

CHANGES IN SACRED TEXTS
AND TRADITIONS

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CHANGES IN SACRED TEXTS AND TRADITIONS

Methodological Encounters and Debates

Edited by

Martti Nissinen and Jutta Jokiranta





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Abbreviations

1QH	Thanksgiving Hymns
1QM	War Scroll
1QS	Serek Hayahad or Rule of the Community
4QBer	Blessings Scroll
4QD	Damascus Document
4QMidrEschat	Midrasch on Eschatology
4QMMT	Miqsat Ma'asê ha-Torah
4QShirShabb	Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice
AAMT	<i>Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory</i>
AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AB	Anchor Bible
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
<i>AeL</i>	<i>Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant</i>
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
Akk.	Akkadian
ANEE	Ancient Near Eastern Empires (project)
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
APAAA	<i>Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association</i>
ARM	<i>Archives royales de Mari</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BAH	Bibliothèque archéologique et historique
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>

<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BHK</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i>
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BSNA	Biblical Scholarship in North America
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>Bull. Math. Bio.</i>	<i>Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>C. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i>
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
CDA	Black, Jeremy A., A. R. George, and J. N. Postgate. <i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i> . 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000.
<i>CdE</i>	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i>
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
<i>CL</i>	<i>Computational Linguistics</i>
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CoE	Centre of Excellence
CSTT	Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (project)
DBS	Digital Biblical Studies
<i>DCH</i>	Clines, David J. A., ed. <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014.
<i>DDD</i>	Toorn, Karel van der, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds. <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
DSI	De Septuaginta Investigationes
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Front. Psychol.</i>	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>
GBSOT	Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series
Ger.	German
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement Series
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JRF	<i>Journal of Religion & Film</i>
JSCS	<i>Journal of Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series

JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KTU	Dietrich, Manfred, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds. <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd enl. ed. of KTU: <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
KUSATU	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MasShirShabb	Masada Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice
MANE	Monographs on the Ancient Near East
masc.	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text
MWM	Melammu Workshops and Monographs
NCB	New Century Bible
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	Stern, Ephraim, ed. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . 4 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
NEB	Die Neue Echter Bibel
NedTT	<i>Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift</i>
NETS	Pietersma, Albert and Benjamin G. Wright, eds. <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA/S	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus / Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OAC	Orientis Antiqui Collectio
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBO.SA	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica
OEANE	Meyers, Eric M., ed. <i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . 5 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> (new series)
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PAM	Palestine Archaeological Museum
PCA	<i>Proceedings of the Classical Association</i>
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
PHSC	Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts
PSL	Perspectives on Syriac Linguistics
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RLA	Ebeling, Erich, et al., eds. <i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SLA	<i>Studies in Late Antiquity</i>
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPhiloA	Studia Philonica Annual
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StOr	Studia Orientalia
SVTG	Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum

SymS	Symposium Series
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TACL	<i>Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
TCSt	Text-Critical Studies
THB	Textual History of the Bible
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TUAT	Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
Ug.	Ugaritic
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VL	Vetus Latina
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZABR	<i>Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

1

Scholarly Community at Work: What Have We Learned?

Martti Nissinen and Jutta Jokiranta

1.1. CSTT in Brief

Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) is the name of a major research project and an international community of fifty-three researchers—doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and senior scholars—working at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Helsinki during a six-year period from 2014 to 2019.¹ Thanks to CSTT, the University of Helsinki was hosting a unit of biblical and cognate studies that probably was the largest in the world during this period of time.

The key term *changes* points at the central element of the project's research agenda, which was to demonstrate how both texts and traditions were the subject of a constant process of transformation. Accordingly, the research of CSTT embraced textual and cultural plurality as driving forces in the emergence of sacred texts and traditions rather than the much appreciated but often illusory qualities of immutability, originality, and unity. The *sacred texts* refer mainly to texts that were held as sacred, were becoming sacred, or eventually became sacred in the Jewish and/or Christian traditions. The analysis of changes in texts involved detailed microlevel study of the manuscripts and ancient translations of biblical texts, but it was not restricted to canonical texts only. The *traditions*, again, widened the scope to the Near Eastern and Greco-Roman world, requiring macrolevel analysis of cross-cultural phenomena and developments in

1. See <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/>; and Martti Nissinen, "Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions: A Centre of Excellence of the Academy of Finland at the University of Helsinki," *HBAI* 2 (2013): 579–86.

the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean. Accordingly, the CSTT community consisted of Hebrew Bible scholars, Assyriologists, archaeologists, and New Testament scholars.

CSTT was one of the Centres of Excellence (CoE) funded by the Academy of Finland for the years 2014–2019. Units that are granted the CoE status by the Academy of Finland are “scientifically first-rate research communities that have capacity for renewal and high societal impact,” selected on the basis of a two-stage application process with international reviewers and interviews and representing all fields of academic research conducted in all fourteen universities in Finland.² The groups that apply for funding may be put together in a number of ways; often they represent more than one field. A significant push for the CSTT application came from a 2010–2011 research evaluation where scholars were invited to form their own groups for the process. But the most important foundation of CSTT was laid by two large former projects: “Formation of Early Jewish and Christian Ideology,” led by Heikki Räisänen (CoE of the Academy of Finland, 1995–2005), and “State Archives of Assyria,” directed by Simo Parpola (CoE of the University of Helsinki, 1997–2001). Of the fourteen Centres of Excellence established by the Academy of Finland for the period 2014–2019, no less than two were based at the University of Helsinki Faculty of Theology, that is, CSTT and the CoE “Reason and Religious Recognition” (director: Risto Saarinen).³ Moreover, some members of CSTT were successful in establishing yet another CoE “Ancient Near Eastern Empires” (ANEE), funded by the Academy of Finland for the period of 2018–2025 under the leadership of Saana Svärd.⁴

The CoE programs have turned out to be of crucial importance for biblical, theological, and ancient Near Eastern research in Finland. They have enabled small disciplines in Finland, such as biblical studies and Assyriology, to develop and prosper considerably.⁵ This is essentially a matter of

2. See <http://tinyurl.com/SBLPress03116a1>. CoE programs have been established every two or four years since 1995, first for a five-year-period, then for six-year periods since 2000, and for eight-year periods since 2018.

3. See <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/reasonandreligiousrecognition/>.

4. See <https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/ancient-near-eastern-empires>.

5. Despite the internationally recognized status of Assyriology in Helsinki, this field was threatening to shrink, with no assigned professorship after Simo Parpola. Yet with ANEE, Saana Svärd has been appointed a tenured professor in ancient Near Eastern studies.

continuity—the CSTT community would not have emerged without the work of the previous Centres of Excellence led by Heikki Räisänen and Simo Parpola some two decades earlier. CSTT and its daughter ANEE testify to the continuing pattern of maintaining top-tier research communities whenever given sufficient resources.

The total funding received by CSTT was €7,124,416, of which 80 percent was granted by the Academy of Finland and the rest by the host institution, the University of Helsinki. A lion's share of the funding was spent on monthly salaries of researchers who were selected by way of three open international calls in 2013, 2014, and 2016. The calls attracted considerable attention, and the quality of applications was high, the acceptance rate being only 10–12 percent.

CSTT members represented ten nationalities (Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States). In addition, the CSTT visitor program brought in twelve scholars from Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom to work in Helsinki for one to three months.

The CSTT community comprised four collaborative units called teams, each having a general subject to which the members contributed with their own research topics. Team 1, “Society and Religion in the Ancient Near East,” was led by Martti Nissinen. Team 1 explored cultural, religious, and demographic developments in the ancient Near East preceding and accompanying biblical texts and traditions, the research topics of the members relating mainly to nonbiblical texts from the ancient Near East and archaeological evidence from the Southern Levant. Team 2, led by Anneli Aejmelaes, focused on the formative phase of the Hebrew Bible under the title “Text and Authority.” The team traced the gradual emergence of the authority of sacred writings by evaluating changes in the textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible, especially the Masoretic Text, Qumran texts, and the Septuagint, and exploring the intertextual use of the Hebrew Bible in Early Jewish and Christian texts, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls and the letters of Paul in the New Testament. Team 3, under the leadership of Juha Pakkala, focused on “Literary Criticism in Light of Documented Evidence” with the main goal of refining and improving conventional literary criticism (*Literarkritik*). Special attention was paid to documented evidence of textual witnesses, which also led the team to investigate the methodological borderline between textual and literary criticism. Team 4, “Society and Religion in Late Second Temple Judaism,” led by Jutta Jokiranta, inquired into changes in practices and beliefs around the turn of the Common Era.

Apart from textual sources (Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish literature, Greek textual evidence), the source materials consisted importantly of new archaeological evidence from the southern Levant. The research topics of Team 4 comprised changes in rituals and practices, intellectual changes, and changes in material culture, and its methodological toolbox even enabled social-scientific approaches.

Martti Nissinen was the director responsible for the whole project, but the management of the project was not entirely on his shoulders. During his sabbatical from 2015 to 2016, the project was led by the vice-director Anneli Aejmelaesus. Already before the beginning of the funding period, CSTT established a board to act as the principal decision-making organ. The advice and support from the two external members of the Scientific Advisory Board nominated by the Academy of Finland, Kristin De Troyer (Salzburg) and George Brooke (Manchester), was especially significant. They attended all six annual meetings and the closing conference, and their suggestions and recommendations were highly appreciated, clearly improving the work and achievements of CSTT.

The members of CSTT were initially divided into two categories, the salaried members with a fixed-term work contract and unsalaried members who were funded by other sources. Almost all members worked in Helsinki; however, a few unsalaried members were based in institutions outside Finland, such as Tartu, Münster, and Hongkong. The salaried members had certain duties, such as participation and presenting in CSTT events and using 5–10 percent of their work time for teaching and/or academic service; for other members, participation in CSTT activities was an expectation but not a duty. At a later stage, it was found necessary to establish a third membership category, that of an associate member, for those members whose contract was completed or who for other reasons moved away from Helsinki but wanted to remain members of the community. This membership category did not include any duties or expectations.

The six annual meetings and the concluding meeting were the main events that gathered the entire CSTT community around the crucial concepts and sources approached by the members from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Each team had regular team-specific meetings, which were open to all members. A CSTT lecture series was established with internal and external lecturers, often invited from among the CSTT visitors. CSTT summer meetings were designed to support career planning, funding applications, and work well-being. Altogether, CSTT or its members (co)organized fifty conferences and workshops

during the six-year period of funding, mainly in Helsinki but also in other places such as Beirut, Hongkong, Jerusalem, Tallinn, and Tbilisi.

CSTT members were regular participants in the conferences of organizations such as the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS), the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT), and the International Association for Assyriology (IAA). Papers read by CSTT members in international conferences from 2014 to 2019 amount to around nine hundred. Largely due to the participation by CSTT members, the University of Helsinki counted among the most active institutions world-wide in the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature 2014–2019. At the 2019 annual meeting in San Diego, for instance, the University of Helsinki was the sixth largest institutional concentration, presenting more papers than any other European institution.⁶

1.2. What Goals Did We Pursue?

The money, time, and freedom provided by the Centre of Excellence funding created ideal circumstances for pursuing ambitious goals, the main objective, of course, being the production of high-quality research under the title “Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions.” CSTT had a research plan that provided a general framework for the study without micromanaging the topics of individual researchers who were free to carry out the research plans the way they deemed best within their respective teams. The outcome of the six-year work period, published between 2014 and 2020 in sixty-seven books and nearly five hundred peer-reviewed articles is too large to be presented as a short list of results. While the large volume of books and articles is representative of the breadth and depth of CSTT research, we became increasingly aware of the importance of the community and its work culture when pursuing our ambitious goals together.

1.2.1. Methodological and Theoretical Encounter

One of the primary goals mentioned in the CSTT research plan was *methodological encounter and cross-fertilization*. Since such a challenge can only

6. Statistics provided by Christopher Hooker, the Society of Biblical Literature’s Director of Membership and Programs, on 12 May 2020.

be met by a large multidisciplinary research community with a significant amount of expertise in different methodologies, the composition of CSTT was designed with this goal in mind. A few examples regarding the study of Judaism in the Second Temple period (mainly in Team 4) will suffice here to demonstrate how such encounters took place. The book *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries* was the first fruit of the attempt to focus on a common topic, that is, the Dead Sea Scrolls, from different methodological angles and with a conscious attempt to break through previous disciplinary and conceptual categories.⁷ The interdisciplinary methodological challenges in Second Temple Judaism were reflected in the joint article of seven CSTT members on changes in research of early Judaism.⁸ The archaeological and textual evidence of early synagogues was the object of a multidisciplinary evaluation in the volume *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine*.⁹ Gender studies that many scholars employed in CSTT inspired a thematic issue of *Dead Sea Discoveries*.¹⁰ The most recent collection of essays, *Scriptures in the Making*, discusses texts and their transmission in late Second Temple Judaism from a contextual point of view involving different methodological approaches.¹¹

The methodological cross-fertilization by way of encounter and negotiation meant a considerable risk at the outset. Taking this risk could not have been possible without the financial resources that enabled us to create a large and globally active research community and the freedom to structure the research community in a way that enhanced methodological encounter and debate. Taking this risk resulted in important insights with regard to possibilities and restrictions of methodological encounter and cross-fertilization. This is reflected in the chapters of the volume at

7. Hanna Tervanotko and Mika S. Pajunen, eds., *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, PFES 108 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015).

8. Jutta Jokiranta et al., "Changes in Research on Judaism in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods: An Invitation to Interdisciplinarity," *ST* 72 (2018): 3–29.

9. Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and Ulla Tervahauta, eds., *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*, FRLANT 279 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

10. Jutta Jokiranta and Jessica Keady, eds., *Gender Studies and Dead Sea Scrolls*, DSD 26.3 (2019).

11. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, eds., *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, CBET 109 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022).

hand, which contain approaches to scholarly practices and ethics, methodological debates, and coauthored case studies on the use of different methodological tools for solving a common research problem. The content of the volume at hand is based on a digestion of things learned during the six years of collaboration, and it demonstrates that methodological encounters can be both rewarding and difficult.

While the cross-disciplinary work was one major goal, the research plan did not specify who was supposed to work with whom or which skills and expertise were needed for each task. The annual meetings were given general, abstract topics (such as “What Is Sacred?”; “What Is Text?”), to which every member found some link or approach. This work typically led to highly conceptual discussions rather than direct results. Therefore, if we wanted to measure to what extent CSTT achieved its goals, two issues need to be noted. Members came to CSTT with their own expertise, educational background, and, at least implicit, learned habits and assumptions about how to run a scholarly enterprise and what to expect. Interdisciplinarity is highly valued by today’s funding agencies, but there are limited structures and resources to support it. Scholars who are by default curious and open-minded also need to feel competent and be goal-oriented. A certain element of insecurity, even sense of threat, is inevitable when scholars are made to overstep the boundaries of their natural habitat. CSTT taught us that scholars need time to build trust and get to know each other—and here all the collective events with community-building, formal and informal discussions, and focused time in different environments were crucial. CSTT could develop into a true community only through such events and the time and money invested in them.

Second, CSTT members know more than they realize they know by simply having spent years in the research community. We claim that the meta-knowledge that the members acquired—the sources they now know exist that they had never heard of before, the enthusiasm in a colleague’s eyes when speaking on a matter they had not thought of, the people they now know from various parts of the world with their individual career paths and university cultures—is a significant part of the results, yet hard to measure or document. Meta-knowledge is valuable, although people sometimes feel frustrated when they do not see immediate results. For example, postgraduate students were rightly concerned whether extra writing projects or other assignments advanced their dissertations. The fun of learning together has to be sufficiently balanced by feelings of competence and freedom in one’s own time management, but it helps if one

learns to see the collective activities as an essential part of academic work, not something that moves the individual away from serious business.

1.2.2. Community Building and Collaborative Teamwork

It was our aim from the beginning to form an *inclusive, collaborative, and nonhierarchical community* of researchers who are open to mutual learning and ready to share their theoretical insights and methodological skills with others, both internally and externally. The team structure and mode of operation was fashioned accordingly, and the members were free to initiate activities, often in collaboration with other academic organizations and communities. The teams prompted a collaborative spirit that became visible in many ways: coauthoring articles and editing interdisciplinary collections of essays, organizing cross-disciplinary events typically focused on methodological issues, and even collaborative competition, that is, helping each other in writing grant proposals. It was our dearest desire to create a sense of belonging among members by way of integration and identification, shared responsibilities, and equal opportunities.¹²

12. Just a few examples for collaborative essays and essay collections in addition to the essays published in the volume at hand and the works mentioned in notes 8–11 above: Anneli Aejmelaeus, Drew Longacre, and Natia Mirotdadze, eds., *From Scribal Error to Rewriting: How Ancient Texts Could and Could Not Be Changed*, DSI 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); Mika S. Pajunen and Jessi Orpana, eds., *Changes in the Study of Sacred Texts*, BN 186 (2020); Raija Mattila, Sanae Ito, and Sebastian Fink, eds., *Animals and Their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World*, Universal- und kulturhistorische Studien (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019); Juha Pakkala and Reinhard Müller, eds., *Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East: What Does Documented Evidence Tell Us about the Transmission of Authoritative Texts?*, CBET 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017); Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy S. Penner, eds., *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*, BZAW 486 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017); Katja Kujanpää and Paavo Huotari, “Hebraizing Revision in Isaiah Quotations in Paul and Matthew,” in *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, CBET 109 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 313–42; Saana Svärd and Martti Nissinen, “(Re)constructing the Image of Assinnu,” in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès García Ventura (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 373–411; Hanne von Weissenberg and Elisa Uusimäki, “Are There Sacred Texts at Qumran? The Concept of Sacred Text in Light of the Qumran Collection,” in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of*

CSTT provided *work opportunities* for a high number of young researchers. Thirty-seven postdoctoral researchers and PhD candidates were directly employed for varying terms, and, in addition, a few researchers funded by other sources were accepted as associate members with the right of participating in our activities and applying for travel grants. Even members who left Helsinki during the funding period, typically postdoctoral researchers who received funding from other institutions, were given the status of associate member.

One of the cornerstones of our community building was *postgraduate education* as a communal effort. A strong element of collective supervision and peer-support complemented the more traditional, bilateral teacher-student relationship: postgraduate students were appreciated as discussion partners and respondents equal to the postdoctoral and senior members in our events. Junior researchers were encouraged to take initiative in organizing workshops, teaching, and peer support. Fifteen CSTT members completed their doctoral degrees, while another five doctoral candidates are still writing their dissertations. Most PhD candidates spent a period from six weeks to a full academic year doing their research at other universities (e.g., Berne, British Columbia in Vancouver, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Emory in Atlanta, Göttingen, Jerusalem, Leiden, Madrid, McMaster in Toronto, Münster, Oxford, Tübingen), and one doctoral degree was based on a *cotutelle* agreement between the Universities of Helsinki and Leiden, the student (Tero Alstola) having been employed by the ERC-funded project “By the Rivers of Babylon” led by Caroline Waerzeggers.

CSTT contributed significantly to the emergence of a *new Centre of Excellence*, “Ancient Near Eastern Empires” (ANEE). The application for this international and interdisciplinary project initiated by four CSTT members (Saana Svärd, Rick Bonnie, Jason Silverman, and Helen Dixon) in collaboration with archaeologists at the University of Helsinki (Antti Lahelma) turned out successfully, receiving funding from the Academy of Finland for the years 2018–2025. CSTT gave full support to the initiative of its members who adopted and improved the organizational and operational model of CSTT. When ANEE was established, some members moved from one project to the other, and the Centres of Excellence mutu-

ally agreed on shared membership of those researchers whose research topics were considered relevant for both projects.

Significant emphasis was laid on *improving the academic work culture*. We wanted to create a model for an interdisciplinary and collaborative research unit in biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, comprising biblical scholars, Assyriologists, and archaeologists. We strived for a tolerant and nonhierarchical mode of operation—a diverse, supportive, keen-to-debate and unprejudiced work environment that tolerated methodological disagreement and encouraged people to move outside their comfort zones. Time will show if and how the practices of our fields of study will improve globally when CSTT-based researchers adapt its mode of operation in the academic communities in which they will continue their work. If we have succeeded in moving our fields of study toward a change of paradigm in academic work culture, it has not only been about changes in sacred texts and traditions but also about changing scholarship.

1.3. What Have We Learned?

1.3.1. Work Culture

We think better together. This is doubtless the best legacy of CSTT that we can take with us wherever we continue our work. Research in the humanities is still mostly solitary work, and this was true even for CSTT. By the same token, we learned the benefits of continuous sharing and testing of research ideas, especially when supported structurally by the research community. While this is especially true for postgraduate students writing their doctoral dissertations, also more advanced members had the opportunity of regularly communicating their research interests, questions, and results within a community that was as critical as it was supportive.

Since CSTT members had varying disciplinary and theoretical backgrounds, we wanted to develop it into a community in which different methodologies and approaches come together as an ongoing forum for exchange and learning—an inclusive space where we could safely disagree without fear of becoming discredited. We learned that methodological cross-fertilization is not an easy and problem-free enterprise, but we also learned that if our encounters do not always lead to agreement, they may help to articulate the disagreement honestly and uncompromisingly in an atmosphere of respect and friendship. This is exemplified in this book by the conversations between Anneli Aejmelaeus and Juha Pakkala on the

interface of textual and literary criticism; between Cynthia Edenburg, Juha Pakkala, Francis Borchardt, and Jason Silverman on the legitimacy of the diachronic type of historical criticism; and between Martti Nissinen and Dalit Rom-Shiloni on the historical study of prophecy and prophetic books. The reader will see that these conversations lead to varying degrees of agreement: while Aejmelaesus and Pakkala as well as Nissinen and Rom-Shiloni eventually find considerable common ground to move forward, it is harder for the representatives and challengers of (diachronic) historical criticism to convince each other about a viable common agenda.

Six years is certainly not enough to change scholarly paradigms, and it was not enough even to fulfil the objectives expressed in the initial research plan about creating a *synthesis* of the processes of tradition and textual production that prompted changes in the texts and traditions under scrutiny. However, many mechanisms of changes that took place in texts and in their sociocultural contexts were revealed, and we certainly took huge leaps toward a more comprehensive view of these changes.

1.3.2. Best Practices

Academic research projects, even major ones, are often not very explicit about their leadership and managements structures. Out of the conviction that transparent management is an important factor in the success and well-being of an academic community, CSTT established a board and wrote rules of procedure for itself well before the funding period started. The board consisted of the director as the chairperson, the vice-director, the other team leaders (later also vice team leaders), as well as one postdoctoral researcher and one postgraduate student chosen by their peers. The board decided on the internal distribution of the funding, was in charge of strategic planning, accepted new members, and decided on the annual program. The board was also responsible for maintaining best practices of leadership and communication within the community.

The procedural rules turned out to function well throughout the funding term. They were, however, soon found wanting with regard to the means and strategies of communication. Therefore, we established a media and communications group that wrote a strategy of communication and took responsibility of the maintenance of communicational channels such as the project's blog (www.cstt.fi) and Twitter account (@CSTT_Helsinki).

A work coaching group led by an external supervisor was established for postgraduate students, who were given the opportunity to reflect and

assess their own work process and problems related to it. According to the participants, the group helped them manage their own research work. Encouraged by this experience, some postdoctoral members even took personal coaching at the partial cost of CSTT.

During our funding period, the problem of the trade with unprovenanced antiquities became acknowledged more widely than ever before in our fields (see the article by Rick Bonnie in this book). Therefore, a policy statement was authored that established standards of conduct for CSTT members regarding the ethics of work with unprovenanced artifacts to avoid any involvement with the illicit trade of antiquities and cultural objects. The members were instructed to be transparent when introducing data of uncertain reliability or authenticity, identifying unprovenanced objects appropriately in their publications. Since some publication projects started in good faith before awareness of the problems became more widespread, the members were expected to do their best to identify the background of any problematic objects and to decide on their own whether to finish their project and publish an artifact in question.

1.3.3. Gender Sensitivity

CSTT was committed to gender sensitivity in all its activities, attempting at equal representation in decision-making and supporting female researchers' careers. Two of the four team leaders were women, and the gender balance of 50 members was nearly perfect (26/27); however, in terms of person-months,¹³ the share of women is only one-third (354/1,097). Several other cases of gender imbalance are pointed out by Francis Borchardt, Saana Svärd, and Hanna Tervanotko, who, therefore, characterize CSTT as "an institution that was exceptionally gender inclusive with structural decisions (i.e., membership, leadership, governance, and guests), but reproduced the inequalities found throughout the field of biblical studies with respect to discretionary decisions (i.e., vice leadership, funding, and speaking opportunities)."¹⁴ It is disappointing that our outspoken commitment did not turn out better. Structural decisions are agenda-setting, while dis-

13. *Person-months* is the term used by the project to indicate the amount of time spent by one person at work.

14. See Francis Borchardt, Saana Svärd, and Hanna Tervanotko, "Gender and Gender Research in a Research Community: CSTT as a Case Study," chapter 15 in this volume.

cretionary decisions are more dependent on situation-specific factors—not least on human and budgetary resources that make the balance sometimes impossible to achieve. Since equitable structures do not automatically produce equitable outcomes, we learned the necessity of “elevated levels of attention and encouragement” for more equitable outcomes.¹⁵

To foster female scholars’ careers and visibility, CSTT organized a writing retreat and career development seminar “Women’s Academia.” Moreover, its members organized a Wikipedia edit-a-thon “Women and the Ancient Near East” to encourage more Wikipedia entries written by female scholars and on female scholars. The session included training by a Wikipedia consultant. Similar sessions were organized at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2018 (Denver) and 2019 (San Diego).

1.3.4. Dissemination and Public Visibility

The study of ancient texts and traditions is typically not immediately relevant for questions that contemporary societies may have; hence, it is seldom of the type that would directly influence political decision-making, public services, or legislation. However, ancient sources can be used as documents of cultural memory, introducing a dimension of historical and epistemic depth into the discussion and debate of contemporary issues. This, indeed, is indispensable: if a society loses its memory, it effectively suffers from dementia. The best impact of a research community like CSTT is to help the historical- and epistemic-depth dimension to become a visible and conscious part of public decision-making as well as of the construction of personal identity.

The expertise of CSTT was particularly related to use and interpretation of sacred texts, especially the Bible, in public discourse and personal life. Therefore, the impact objective of CSTT was to stimulate knowledge-based awareness of and discussion on the implications of interpretation of sacred traditions. The members were very active in public dissemination of their research, making regular appearances on television and radio (47 times), always on channels with nationwide or even international coverage. They were interviewed 110 times by national and local newspapers and magazines, as well as by media with emphasis on religious

15. See Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, “Gender and Gender Research,” 529.

issues. The members themselves contributed 170 articles to magazines and professional journals—mostly written in Finnish but also in English, Japanese, and Hebrew. One example of the impact of popular writings is the lively discussion prompted by Juha Pakkala's article in *Tiede* "Raamatun sana on niin kuin se luetaan" ["The Word of the Bible Is What You Read"] (2015), which triggered over 2,000 reactions on Facebook alone.

CSTT maintained a blog and a Twitter account. With its nearly 100,000 visits by nearly 40,000 individual visitors, two-thirds of which from countries other than Finland, the CSTT blog has served as an easy-access channel of information on relevant topics. Likewise, the 1,332 Twitter followers and 443,000 views of 1,285 tweets indicate a good outreach. Another platform actively used by CSTT and its members is YouTube. CSTT is involved in eighteen YouTube videos that have been viewed circa 100,000 times.¹⁶

16. Visits counted on 19 October 2022. Finnish: Martti Nissinen, "Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions," YouTube, 7 November 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JY0uzKj9vw&t=3s>; Nissinen, "What Kind of a Bible Would You Put Together?," YouTube, 15 December 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATtYC6N1IaE&t=22s>; Ville Mäkipelto, "On the Academic Study of the Bible," YouTube, 30 September 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nni20csdGTQ>; Martti Nissinen, "Is There Magic in Christianity?," YouTube, 11 February 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzJNmR9ZV28&t=4s>; Martti Nissinen, Mika Kajava, and Tom Sjöblom, "Contingency and the Divine Will," YouTube, 7 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC_U86ZWsk0&t=2254s; Saana Svärd and Ville Mäkipelto, "Women and Gender in the Ancient Near East," YouTube, 31 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-hpMtXFEWc&t=24s>; Juha Pakkala and Ville Mäkipelto, "Immigrants and Refugees in the Bible," YouTube, 28 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY0gUGawGD8&t=406s>; Jutta Jokiranta and Ville Mäkipelto, "How the Dead Sea Scrolls Revolutionized Our Knowledge of the Bible," YouTube, 19 December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9WkIdXZS6A>; Martti Nissinen, "Immigrants Changing the Society," YouTube, 30 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgUkyuLlrz0>; Ville Mäkipelto, "Conference on Changes in Biblical Texts in Hong Kong," YouTube, 1 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imtXvXNCpOI>; Saana Svärd, "Women in Egypt and Mesopotamia," YouTube, 13 September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSjcOrdulsI>; Ville Mäkipelto, "Dissertation on Changes in Biblical Texts," YouTube, 25 January 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZmbug7Y-sE>; Martti Nissinen and Jessi Orpana, "How Changes in Biblical Texts Are Studied," YouTube, 11 December 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5vIuhOIaxl&t=161s>; Martti Nissinen, Antti Lahelma, and Sanna Saari, "How History Is Studied," YouTube, 8 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzWkdIjUO9Q>; Martti Nissinen and

A popular book in Finnish with the title *Kiveen hakattu: Pyhät tekstit ja perinteet muutoksessa* (Carved in stone? Changes in sacred texts and traditions) with thirteen articles by twenty-seven members of CSTT was published in the Academy of Finland series (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2018). The presentation of this book gathered a large audience at Helsinki Book Fair 2018. Moreover, the members gave some 130 talks altogether for general and professional audiences in Finland and elsewhere. The topics dealt with in popular writings, public talks, and interviews were related especially (but not exclusively) to the Bible and biblical traditions. The Bible-related issues were interwoven with a variety of contemporary topics, for instance, the history and contemporary situation of the Middle East; migration and refugees; prophecy and prediction; Qumran scrolls and forgery; archaeology in Israel from various angles, including climate change; war and peace in sacred texts and in their interpretation. These are topics that bring the historical- and epistemic-depth dimension to contemporary issues.

1.4. About This Volume

The present volume consists of methodological debates, coauthored research articles, reflections on practices and ethics, and more general reflections on wider changes in the field. The purpose of this somewhat unusual combination is to offer a glimpse into various aspects of work in the CSTT community: examples of how theoretical encounters took place in our research, ongoing debates on appropriate methodology, growing awareness of the need of ethical practices in scholarship, and the wisdom of senior scholars who followed intensively our work. In this way, we want to present research as an open-ended process, which continues to search for better ways of working as a scholarly community, thanks to the collaborative and conscious agencies of the individuals involved.

Tuomas Heikkilä, “Religion, Science, and Politics,” YouTube, 19 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0sPAC2O0iw&t=342s>. Spanish/English: Martti Nissinen and César Silva, “Homosexualidad en la Biblia: Lo que no sabías,” YouTube, 22 September 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWlicsDeRZ8&t=1094s>; Nissinen and Silva, “Adivinación y profecía en la Biblia,” YouTube, 11 October 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMjjs_IWPP4&t=468s; English: Agnès Garcia Ventura and Saana Svärd, “Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East,” YouTube, 28 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12Fjmcz4Whc>.

Part 1 gives voice to ongoing debates and conversations on themes where diverging opinions are a reality. The first debate (chapter 2) concerns the nature and usefulness of historical criticism as a method in biblical studies. While arguing for (Cynthia Edenburg and Juha Pakkala) and against (Francis Borchardt and Jason M. Silverman) this established scholarly practice, the authors explicate how they understand the purpose and underlying assumptions of historical criticism or, more precisely, *Literarkritik*. The reader is offered the opportunity to decide whether this method is essential for history writing, although in need of revision, or expendable as a flawed and poorly based method.

In the second debate (chapter 3), two scholars discuss the proper relation of textual criticism and literary criticism. Anneli Aejmelaesus sees textual criticism and literary criticism as fully integrated and belonging together, while Juha Pakkala considers them separate, even though closely linked methods. The debate brings a new perception of textual study to the fore that seeks to understand what happened to the text, whether or not changes were intentional, and to what extent the phases of its transmission are documented in the manuscript evidence.

In the third debate (chapter 4), Martti Nissinen and Dalit Rom-Shiloni address the problems of using the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible as historical evidence. Nissinen lays out different aspects of the problem, the manuscript evidence, the ancient Near Eastern comparative evidence, and the method of dating of the prophetic books. Rom-Shiloni argues for a change in prophetic activity and prophetic writing early on, not (only) in the Second Temple period. Both Nissinen and Rom-Shiloni understand prophecy as part of the wider phenomenon of Near Eastern divination and agree on the need for a diachronic analysis of biblical books. The differences between them become clear in the way in which they identify the process and dating of the textualization of prophecy, the distinction between the prophet and the scribe, and the use of comparative evidence such as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Ever since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there has been an ongoing discussion on how a text can be defined as "Scripture." In chapter 5, Jessi Orpana and Christian Seppänen, instead of debating each other, identify and organize criteria for the "sacred" or "authoritative" status of texts that enjoyed special appreciation in late Second Temple Judaism. The usefulness of different criteria is evaluated with the result that scriptural status of a text is not an either-or question but may vary in different times and contexts, depending on the communities who used and produced it.

Part 2 comprises coauthored case studies on the benefits of methodological and interdisciplinary encounters, exploring the limits and boundaries of present methodologies. The first two essays concern the methodological interfaces of Assyriology with digital humanities and biblical studies. Tero Alstola and Saana Svärd (chapter 6) introduce new methodological developments for analyzing ancient Near Eastern texts, especially semantic domains in Akkadian lexemes. The authors combine elements from the study of cultures (emic–etic), linguistics (paradigmatic and syntagmatic categories), language technology (e.g., PMI and fastText), and network theory (visualizations). This combination of approaches is considered to yield good results for other ancient languages as well. Sebastian Fink and Gina Konstantopoulos (chapter 7) offer an overview of how past scholarship has viewed the relationship between biblical studies and Assyriology, providing helpful cornerstones and examples. The examples from more recent popular culture and new museums reveal the need to further unleash the ancient Near Eastern studies from biblical bondage.

Two essays connect textual criticism with methodologies not typically associated with it: archaeology and gender studies. Izaak J. de Hulster and Tuukka Kauhanen (chapter 8) reexamine 2 Sam 20:18–19, considering the archaeological findings of Iron Age sites at Tel Abel and Tel Dan and examining the textual and iconographic implications of the motif of the “woman on the wall.” The plausibility of the historical settings implied in the story is evaluated in light of the textual and archaeological evidence. Timo Tekoniemi and Patrik Jansson (chapter 9) demonstrate how the Masoretic text and the Septuagint can be fruitfully compared for their gender constructions of the prophet Elijah, Queen Jezebel, and King Ahab in the stories of 1 Kgs 18, 19, and 21(20), and how the texts reveal less than straightforward performances of gender for each of these characters.

The next two essays explore the potential of more recently introduced tools in biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, that is, cognitive science and evolutionary studies. Jutta Jokiranta, Ville Mäkipelto, and Miika Tucker (chapter 10) present a brief research history on anthropomorphism in the Septuagint, introducing new studies in cognitive science on depicting God in human terms. The authors argue that cognitive research helps us to understand how anthropomorphism in the Bible is to a certain extent unavoidable. Moreover, it is a different thing to avoid bodily depictions and to avoid mental depictions. The authors also propose that linguistic categories constrain thinking. Lauri Laine and Jutta Jokiranta (chapter 11) examine the ancient Near Eastern idea of a divine council from the

perspective of cultural evolution. The authors challenge the assumption of the divine council as a declining remnant of earlier polytheist conceptions, offering an alternative methodology that examines transmission and inheritance of cultural entities.

The last essay of part 2 (chapter 12) develops a comparative view of Ps 29. Reinhard Müller and Joanna Töyräänvuori construct their view of the textual history of the psalm, comparing each constructed section and the theme of the psalm with a wide array of Near Eastern comparative material, textual as well as iconographic. Points of comparison are recognized in themes, terminology, *Sitz im Leben*, as well as in poetry, structure, and metaphors.

The three essays in part 3 arise from discussions in CSTT meetings, reflecting some crucial topics that concern scholarly practices and research ethics. Michael C. Legaspi (chapter 13) takes a fresh look at historical criticism from the ethical point of view. He reviews arguments for and against the use of historical criticism in biblical studies, calling for a common commitment to a new kind of scholarly virtue ethics that serves some larger vision of life. Rick Bonnie's (chapter 14) point of departure is the growing attention to unprovenanced objects, including text-bearing artifacts without a clear find-context or documentation of ownership. Biblical scholars are placed among other actors within the global antiquities trade, and the author outlines the harmful effects of such trade. In the name of intergenerational equity, work on the large amounts of documented artifacts in museum storages and archives should be preferred over the publication of new, unprovenanced artifacts. Chapter 15 reflects the ethics of gender inclusion and exclusion in research communities, using CSTT as a test case. Francis Borchardt, Saana Svärd, and Hanna Tervanotko provide statistics of the gender balance in the organization and representation in CSTT governance, activities, and events. Furthermore, they outline to what extent gender in the ancient world was studied within CSTT and how its work relates to the changes within gender and feminist studies and in biblical studies.

The volume concludes with two reflective essays by scholars who followed the work of CSTT closely over the years. George J. Brooke (chapter 16) argues that the study of the Bible should be part of the study of the humanities and social sciences, as it has much to offer that is worth considering by other disciplines and interacts responsibly with relevant developments in cognate areas. Christoph Levin (chapter 17) views CSTT itself as part of the processes of tradition formation and transmission that

were the object of its research. In his estimation, CSTT demonstrates the lasting impact of interdisciplinary research, not only on research itself but also on the exchange among established researchers and on the training of young academics.

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Part 1
Debating Methodology

2

Historical Criticism: Essential or Expendable?

Cynthia Edenburg, Francis Borchardt,
Jason M. Silverman, and Juha Pakkala

2.1. Statement Papers

2.1.1. Cynthia Edenburg: In Defense of Historical Criticism

I must confess that I was not always an advocate of historical criticism. As a young student I was particularly influenced by Meir Weiss's Total Criticism, which drew upon the New Criticism movement in aesthetics and literary studies of the mid-twentieth century.¹ Like the New Criticism, Total Criticism upheld the autonomy of literary texts and maintained that their significance is constructed and perceived through the practice of close reading, which viewed the text as a whole and not just the sum of its parts. According to this method, the significance of the text is accessible to all competent readers and is not dependent upon knowledge of the historical circumstances of its composition. Undoubtedly, this sounds much like Brevard Childs's canon/canonical criticism,² except that Weiss anticipated Childs by more than a decade. Moreover, although Weiss was a deeply religious person, his method did not have the overt theological aim of Childs's program but instead drew upon a wealth of studies in literary theory.

The holistic appreciation of the text gained through close reading appealed to me as a young student since it upheld the text's integrity and

1. Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984); originally published in Hebrew by Mosad Bialik in 1962.

2. On the development of Childs's approach see, e.g., Anthony C. Thiselton, "Canon, Community and Theological Construction," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholemew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 5–9.

sought to uncover its inner aesthetic. By contrast, historical criticism seemed to tear the text to shreds, reducing it to a pile of fragments—and who cared what their historical context was, anyway?

With time I learned to care about history, and admittedly, many biblical texts make little sense outside their historical contexts. Any historian knows that after collecting their sources, the next step of historical research is to evaluate the sources; to understand the voices behind them, the evidence they give, and their historical context. Only then can the historian employ them as historical witnesses. To me this indicates that without historical criticism, the biblical sources are worthless as historical witnesses since no other method provides tools for identifying their voices and evaluating their historical contexts. Without historical criticism, the depth of our knowledge of the history of Israel and Judah in the first two-thirds of the first millennium BCE is limited to a handful of notices in epigraphic sources and some local administrative sources, while our knowledge of its culture is dependent upon prosopography, material finds, and some disputed inscriptions. Without historical criticism, the earliest starting point for biblical inquiry is with the first known material textual witnesses, which date to the third century BCE.

Some scholars reject historical and redaction criticism, claiming that the results of a given diachronic analysis are not self-evident. They further argue that practitioners of historical criticism fail to replicate one another's results. But is this a valid criticism? Do scholars in fact fail to replicate one another's results? Academic culture discourages publication of derivative work; hence scholars are not likely to dwell upon how they *independently* replicated their colleagues' analyses and instead make do with a footnote acknowledging their use of a previous model. At the same time, those who publish differing results of analysis might be rewarded for originality. In fact, those who dismiss historical criticism on the basis of lack of consensus produce no hard evidence that this is in fact so and have not conducted controlled trials in which X number of scholars sit down with the same text and analyze it according to the same set of criteria.

Some dismiss historical criticism as speculative and not grounded in empirical evidence. However, some form of speculation is part and parcel of scientific investigation.³ This criticism of speculation is difficult to

3. See Cynthia Edenburg, "Falsifiable Hypotheses, Alternate Hypotheses and the Methodological Conundrum of Biblical Exegesis," ZAW 132 (2020): 383–401, which was first presented as a keynote address at the CSTT meeting in Sannäs, Porvoo, 2019.

reconcile with the growing interest in speculative sciences such as astrophysics. Frequently speculation precedes finding empirical evidence that substantiates the theorem. Some disciplines, like philosophy, are wholly dependent upon speculation followed up by argumentation since no empirical evidence exists to substantiate various propositions. This leads me to wonder whether speculation is egregious specifically when it occurs in biblical criticism but is tolerable in other disciplines?

Without historical criticism, how can one make sense of a chapter such as 2 Sam 7? This chapter is marked by dramatic changes in Hebrew diction (e.g., the contrast between the Late Biblical Hebrew in David's prayer, vv. 18–29 and the Standard Biblical Hebrew of the rest of the chapter), internal inconsistencies with regard to a house for Yahweh and a house for David (vv. 11–16), as well as tension with other sources (perpetual dynasty, vv. 13, 16, or conditional promise, 1 Kgs 8:25, 9:3–5; Ps 132:11–12). Is it justified to abandon the attempt to uncover the historical and social circumstances of the scribes who contributed to the development of this chapter and to give up understanding the historical background of the different ideologies it reflects? Without the tools of historical criticism, we can only start our inquiry from the earliest stages of the history of interpretation that are based upon final form readings.

In conclusion, without historical criticism of literary sources, the historian is badly crippled, particularly when dealing with a period that has left few remains of primary sources. Understanding the past that produced long-lived cultural artifacts such as biblical literature is an important part of human self-understanding, and historical criticism is a useful tool toward achieving that end. The problem is not with the method, but with how it is applied, misapplied, or abused.

2.1.2. Juha Pakkala: Why Historical Criticism Is Essential

It is probable that most texts in the Hebrew Bible are the result of intensive scribal activity, which resulted in multilayered texts unparalleled in world literature. Because textual layers derive from different sociohistorical contexts and times, the Hebrew Bible is an exceptionally difficult historical source. It is also a key source for biblical studies and essential for many central questions regarding ancient Israel and early Judaism, and therefore biblical scholars have tried to reconstruct the development of biblical texts since the early days of research into the Bible. Some scribal changes are preserved in text-critical variants, but much of the transmission is

not documented in manuscript evidence. In those cases, biblical scholars have looked for text-internal indicators that would indicate late additions: inconsistencies, contradictions, syntactic/grammatical problems, exceptional terminology, narrative irregularity, and more. This approach was developed into a method called literary criticism (*Literarkritik*), which had a prominent role in biblical studies for much of the twentieth century.⁴ Its heyday is now past, and some scholars also question its scientific basis,⁵ but it is more commonly neglected in favor of other approaches that are regarded as more relevant.

In earlier research, the pursuit of the original texts or sources was a major goal of literary criticism. One sought to find the original words of Jesus or Jeremiah or the original sources of the Pentateuch, for example. This goal, which has been rightly criticized by the method's critics,⁶ is hardly realistic anymore, for an original text is often elusive or even misleading as a concept. The *development* or evolution of texts has become more important. Instead of regarding the later additions as less important than the older text, it is now better recognized that the scribal changes provide significant information about changes and developments in the transmitting societies.⁷ The diachronic development of texts shows how conceptions, religion, and social environments changed. Especially in the Hebrew Bible most of the historical information is in the additions, while the original text—if there ever was one—may be unreachable or illusory.

Literary criticism has been criticized on the grounds that its results are too uncertain and conjectural. Raymond Person and Robert Rezetko have made this explicit in their edited volume *Empirical Models Challenging*

4. The term *historical criticism* primarily refers to the so-called higher criticism. The German term *historisch-kritische Methode* usually includes textual criticism as well, while the English term often does not include it. There appears to be confusion about these terms. See John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 1–3, who prefers to call the method *biblical criticism*.

5. E.g., Raymond F. Person Jr. and Robert Rezetko, *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, AIL 25 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 1–35, and Benjamin Ziemer, *Kritik des Wachstumsmodells: Die Grenzen alttestamentlicher Redaktionsgeschichte im Lichte empirischer Evidenz*, VTSup 182 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

6. Ziemer, *Kritik des Wachstumsmodells*, 7–24.

7. E.g., Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Biblical Criticism.⁸ For example, *Wiederaufnahme* (resumptive repetition) would be too uncertain a criterion for later additions because a single author may, after making a thematic digression, repeat a textual segment from the preceding text.⁹ The criticism stems from an expectation that the method delivers proven theories as in empirical or natural sciences. It is also implied that the criteria are to be implemented mechanically. These expectations are partly due to the nature of the method. A list of criteria may give the *impression* of an empirical science and mathematical accuracy. Perhaps the discussion about “empirical evidence,” or “empirical models,” as phrased by Jeff Tigay, has contributed to this notion.¹⁰

Literary criticism is part of human sciences, and its theories are never certain or proven. Its theories attain levels of probability depending on their overall arguments, but there is never a point where a theory reaches 100 percent certainty after a number of indicators for a later scribal intervention have been gathered. This would be a misunderstanding of the method. Literary criticism is also criticized for lack of consensus, but this is not exceptional in the study of ancient history, especially since sources are scanty and often poorly understood. When compared to other approaches to biblical studies, theories based on literary criticism cannot be considered particularly unreliable, but because of the established criteria it is easier for a critic to pinpoint a methodological problem or criticize a specific criterion (such as *Wiederaufnahme*). Approaches with a murky or largely lacking methodology are more difficult to criticize. It is not uncommon that the Hebrew Bible is studied without a clear methodology, and this is especially evident in the use of the texts as sources. Despite questionable source criticism and lacking any methodological basis, far-reaching historical conclusions are commonly made on the basis of biblical texts as historical sources (see below).

The criteria used in literary criticism should be seen as *possible indicators* for later editing. Good introductions to the method highlight this. None of the criteria should ever be used alone. If there are several indicators, a hypothesis that a text is not coherent becomes more probable

8. Despite the title of the volume, the challenges or voiced criticism of biblical criticism is nearly completely limited to the introduction of the volume by Person and Rezetko, while some of the authors in fact make use of the method.

9. Person and Rezetko, *Empirical Models*, 25–30.

10. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

(cumulative evidence).¹¹ If one only sees one indicator, the hypothesis is very weak and, in most cases, not sufficient to assume a scribal intervention. It is always about probabilities and the ability of a theory to convince by its arguments. The criteria are meant to help the scholars put forward the arguments on paper, but they should not be implemented mechanically. More important is a deep understanding of the analyzed text and general knowledge of the sociohistorical backgrounds of biblical texts.

Rather than a fully proven textual history, a literary-critical reconstruction is an abstraction of a very complicated development that may bring important information even if many segments of the reconstruction remain uncertain. It is not imperative that one detect every addition and reconstruct every word of the textual history. It is more important to detect general developments of conceptions, ideas, and other issues that may reveal something about the social context behind the texts. For example, a literary-critical reconstruction of Ezra-Nehemiah may conclude that priests and Levites were added to the composition.¹² There may be weak arguments for an addition in some passages, but if one can show in a number of passages that they were probably added, a general theory becomes more certain. A reconstruction in any given verse could be incorrect in some way, but the cumulative evidence makes the general theory more probably that priests and Levites had limited or no role in the earlier composition of Ezra-Nehemiah and that their role was assumed to be central in the context of later scribes. This is significant historical information that cannot be gleaned without the method, and other sources for the Persian and Hellenistic period Jewish communities are very fragmentary. The alternative would be to leave the text without a literary-critical analysis and use it as a historical source for fifth- or fourth-century Judah, as many historians do. For example, in his history of the Persian Empire, Pierre Briant uses the Masoretic Text (MT) of Ezra-Nehemiah as a historical source for a variety of issues about Yehud

11. See Vilho Riekkinen and Timo Veijola, *Johdatus eksegetiikkaan: Metodioppi*, PFES 37 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1983): 111 “the probability that a text derives from different authors depends on the number of criteria. One is usually not enough, while cumulative evidence increases its probability” (translation from the Finnish original by Pakkala).

12. See Juha Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8*, BZAW 347 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 266–75.

and Jewish communities in the Persian period.¹³ A lack of criticism of sources leads to distortions in our view of history. Many other examples of the detrimental effect that an avoidance of literary criticism has on biblical exegesis could be given, but from the perspective of historical criticism, this leads to a problematic methodological basis for any historical study of the text. A further alternative would be to ignore the text completely as a historical source, but then a similar position should be consistently taken toward all heavily edited and multilayered texts in the Hebrew Bible.

This does not mean that there is nothing to criticize about historical criticism. Some of the method's axioms are problematic, especially in view of documented text-critical evidence. Omissions as a scribal technique have been commonly neglected or even rejected,¹⁴ but text-critical variants show that they took place in some circumstances, especially when a text contained something theologically offensive.¹⁵ Similarly, redactions that revised entire books or compositions from a theological perspective are conventionally assumed in redaction-critical models, but they find very little support in documented evidence. These are areas where the method needs to be better anchored in documented evidence.¹⁶

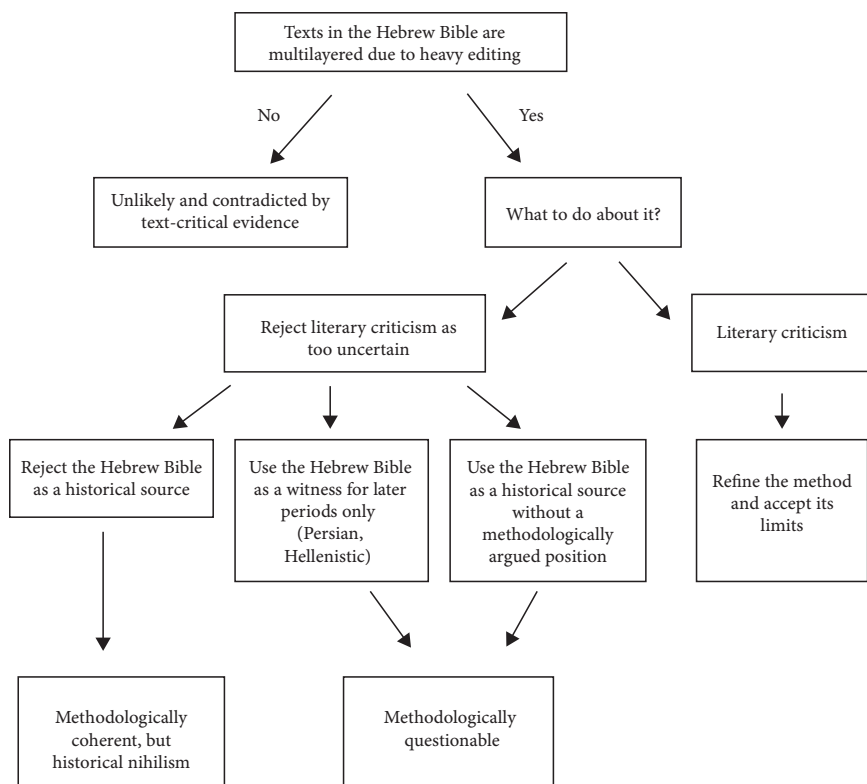
There are not many alternatives to literary criticism if the Hebrew Bible is used as a historical source for early Israel and emerging Judaism. The basic reason for using such a laborious method is the nature of its texts. Intensive scribal revision for centuries left the texts multilayered and thus exceedingly difficult historical sources for any specific period. Biblical scholars have to have a methodologically coherent and arguable position on what to do about such texts if they are used as historical sources. The alternatives to historical criticism can be illustrated in the following decision tree:

13. See Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter D. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 583–87.

14. E.g., Uwe Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments*, 3rd. ed., UTB 2664 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 84.

15. See Juha Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible*, FRLANT 251 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 183–252.

16. Assumed, e.g., by Timo Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose (Deuteronomium): Kapitel 1, 1–16, 17*, ATD 8.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).



Historical nihilism may be comfortable, since it avoids the uncertainties of historical reconstructions involved in all human sciences. If one adopts this position, it should be consistently applied to all study of history, and one should also recognize its philosophical implications and consequences for our understanding of history. However, it is much more common that the Hebrew Bible is used as a historical source without an argued position on the source value of its texts. This is methodologically highly questionable, as textual layers from different times are mixed in the final versions of texts. For which period is a multilayered text a historical source? This is related to the existence of variant editions for many biblical texts. Which one of the witnesses (the MT, Qumran manuscripts, Septuagint, or Vetus Latina) is to be used as the historical source? Commonly it is the Masoretic Text, although in many books (e.g., Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) it is very likely to be generally younger than the Septuagint or the Old Greek. Variants occur in nearly every verse of the Hebrew Bible, and many of them are significant for historical questions. Because of the variant

versions, one cannot avoid addressing the complexities of an evolving text unless one merely chooses to ignore them and uses the Masoretic Text. But this is obviously problematic for a scientific approach. These problems are not avoided by adopting a different approach toward the text, such as the social-scientific approach, for there also has to be a source text to which the method is applied. The alternative positions toward the texts of the Hebrew Bible as historical sources are thus not unproblematic. An evaluation of literary criticism and its efficacy should be seen in view of the alternatives, their implications, and consequences. Therefore, if the historical study of the Hebrew Bible has a future in the twenty-first century, literary criticism should have an essential role in it.

2.1.3. Francis Borchart: Challenges to Historical-Critical Methods

For the purposes of this discussion, I believe some definition is in order. Before I express an opinion on historical criticism one way or the other, it is probably helpful that both the audience and I know what it is that I am actually writing about. Since *historical criticism* is not a term that commonly refers to a specific method but to any number among a handful of so-called traditional approaches, more precision is necessary. I shall proceed, then, with the premise that historical criticism refers, in this case, to a basket of procedures adopted to study the compositional process of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean texts. Whether we use terms like *source criticism*, *tradition criticism*, *form criticism*, *redaction criticism*, or even *Literarkritik* (*literary criticism*), practitioners of these approaches are interested in discerning the ways in which a literary work, however that might be defined (or more often not defined), has changed across place, time, and medium. This, as I understand it, is the subject of this discussion. And this is what I am writing about when I assert that historical criticism does not need to be abandoned. Instead, its practitioners need to focus on what it does well and abandon any pretense that it is useful for other questions.

So, what is historical criticism good at, and where does it miss the mark? The latter question is probably an easier target, so I shall take aim there first. Recent empirical work on composition, like the studies published by Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala,¹⁷ has clearly and succinctly

17. Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, RBS 75 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Müller and Pakkala, eds., *Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible*

laid out manuscript evidence suggesting that the content, extent, and even shape of literary works changes across medium, location, and time. Because this work attends specifically to differences present in manuscripts, versions, and so-called rewritten texts, it provides the most tangible and comprehensive evidence for the types of change that are endemic to ancient compositional practice. Therefore, it is interesting to note that, in their work, Müller and Pakkala present very little evidence for the kind of linear and programmatic change in literary works that we would term redaction. That is, when various manuscripts and versions of literary works are placed side-by-side, this comparison does not corroborate the idea that an ancient compositional agent would go through a work systematically making changes to support a favored ideology or *Weltanschauung*. Instead, the empirical work shows that change happens on a granular level, with individual words, sentences, paragraphs, or even passages being added or omitted in isolation from other changes. In addition, as most people in the field are well aware, scholarship on the Pentateuch in the last half century has found that, other than a prominent Priestly voice, individually identifiable sources have been less reliably identified than was previously imagined. Instead, there, too, scholars have moved toward models wherein these sources are more diverse and included into compositions sporadically throughout the composition process.

So no or few redactions. No or few identifiable sources. What of it? The problem is that these findings undermine one of the fundamental premises of the approach's contribution to understanding history. If changes to the content, extent, and shape of literary works primarily happen on a small scale without a dominant ideological or aesthetic program governing their introduction, and if the sources for a literary work are largely elusive, how can historical criticism reliably claim to reveal anything about the situations in which such changes were made or in which the sources were composed and then combined?

This leads to the second problem: historical criticism is not really historical. Practitioners of historical criticism claim that its *raison d'être* is a Rankean demand to get back to the real primary sources, so that they

and the Ancient Near East: What Does Documented Evidence Tell Us about the Transmission of Authoritative Texts?, CBET 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017); Müller and Pakkala, *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible: Toward a Refined Literary Criticism*, RBS 97 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022).

can reconstruct history “how it actually was.”¹⁸ Many say that because one does not actually reach the primary source(s) until one separates the various changes introduced through ancient compositional practice, history cannot be done without their work. Yet when we examine studies employing the basket of approaches we have included under the term historical criticism, we find a remarkable lack of nuance. Even if we charitably accept historical critics’ claims to have discovered the primary sources and redactional layers of a literary work as evidence of momentous stages in the cultic, political, and/or ideological situation of ancient communities, it is remarkable how neatly these conclusions are fit into just a few myths prominently narrated in other sources. “This must have accompanied Josiah’s reforms,” “This must have been added during the period of exile,” and “this is probably from the period of return” are no doubt phrases everyone in the field has read or heard before. Now, such clustering might stem from periods of great intellectual activity and capacity, like that hypothesized by some scholars for fifth-century BCE Athens. But I suspect that these clusters, instead, arise from a dearth of criticism of the primary sources once they have ostensibly been discovered. After the work of isolation of the sources and redactions is complete, at least the

18. The quotation itself (“wie es eigentlich gewesen ist”) comes from Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535* (Leipzig: Reimer, 1824), 1:vi, and refers to the historian’s task as reconstructing and reporting what things had actually been like. Pakkala, Müller, and ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 2–4, for example, note that one of the purposes of their volume is to show that “editing has been so substantial and frequent that biblical scholars may not neglect or bypass editorial processes as irrelevant. Instead, one should determine the existence, extent, and impact of editorial changes on the texts of the Hebrew Bible if they are used as sources for historical purposes.” The authors go on to say that taking “the MT as the sole source of historical investigation, as is done in many studies, would seem to be highly questionable or even arbitrary from a scientific point of view. Some of the material in this volume shows that in many cases, a more original version of a passage is documented in witnesses other than the MT, while the MT is substantially edited and contains secondary readings.” On the ubiquity of this perspective among historians of ancient Israel see the masterful essay of Joachim Schaper, “... wie es eigentlich gewesen: Historical ‘Facts’ and the Reconstruction of the History of ‘Ancient Israel,’” in *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies*, ed. James Aitken, Katherine Dell, and Brian Mastin, BZAW 420 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 153–67. In his essay, Schaper shows that this attitude toward the Hebrew Bible as a source goes beyond historical criticism and permeates scholarship of the so-called Copenhagen school.

skeletal structure of these myths tends to be taken at face value. The great events of biblical mythology then become great voids in which anything might have happened.¹⁹ I shall not get into a critique of historical criticism from a New Historicist perspective, but such concerns are not only valid but central to understanding why historical criticism might be bankrupt as a historical discipline.²⁰

I am not entirely negative about what historical critics do, though. Surprising, I know! While I have spent time criticizing their approach to history, historical critics are deeply attuned to many aspects of the aesthetic presentation of literary works. They keenly identify changes in voice, inconsistencies in meter, disruptions in narrative plot, and shifts in character. Their skill in this type of work has been proven by the previously mentioned empirical studies of Müller and Pakkala. Manuscripts frequently show that there have been changes precisely where previous generations of historical critics have posited different sources, interpolations, and/or omissions. Given this skill, I think there is an opportunity for historical critics to make important contributions to the fields of early Judaism and early Christianity. But first they must decide on who they are and what they are doing. If they are interested in doing history, in the construction/reconstruction of past events, I am afraid they need to abandon their approach. This is true whether they are interested in understanding large-scale movements or the diachronic change of literary works. Their current approach is simply not suited to answer such questions. This is why historians in other fields have long abandoned this approach they once shared. If, on the other hand, historical critics want to focus on what they do well, they should turn wholesale to the understanding

19. On this phenomenon, see Philip Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel": A Study in Biblical Origins* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 40–41, who remarks in particular on the use of the exile as a period of remarkable literary production, while also noting that there is little knowledge or evidence of such activity either in Palestine or Babylon from this period.

20. Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism*, GBSOT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 23–36, offers a nuanced critique of historicism, a term which in her usage is mirrored by my use of historical criticism in this essay. She shows that while both approaches value the past, historicism ultimately understands it to be recoverable and separate from the agency of those who are responsible for its preservation and recovery. New Historicism, on the other hand, understands the past to always be contingent upon the authors, curators, and historians who write histories, and therefore always views any history with skepticism.

of literary art in the eras, languages, and texts they study. They should focus on questions like: What aesthetic values prevail in a given text? How are these values different from those in a different manuscript/version? In what ways do changes in voice or in meter not only signal a different compositional situation but communicate how a text nudges its audiences toward one interpretation over another? If they would focus on these literary questions and leave historical questions to an approach better suited, they would do themselves and the field a great service.

2.1.4. Jason M. Silverman: A Critique of Historical-Critical Reason

To be provocative and hyperbolic: what has traditionally been called the historical-critical method is neither historical nor critical nor even a method; it is a bundle of presuppositions attempting to escape theology and to move toward historiography but failing to do so. Since practitioners have often failed to treat the texts as they would any other sort of ancient evidence, they end up being guilty of category mistakes, confusing modern and theological propositions with plausible historical ones.

The above paragraph is, of course, an exaggeration. More seriously, many scholars who claim the mantle of the historical-critical-method tradition are insightful, careful, and erudite. The point I wish to stress, however, is that the tradition utilizes presuppositions that do not match the ways humans actually function in the real world, nor are appropriate for the time periods in which the texts under discussion developed; moreover, these presuppositions would not be granted credibility for any other piece of evidence beyond the biblical texts. The problem is not the intended project (the changes of traditions as evidenced via texts through time) but the assumptions that guide its analysis.

If, for the sake of argument, we take the presuppositions of the various methods as given by David R. Law in his 2012 *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed*, then all of them are invalid.²¹ Below is a list of his presuppositions, and some reasons why they are invalid presuppositions.

21. David R. Law, *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed*, T&T Clark Guides for the Perplexed (London: T&T Clark, 2012). Law gives presuppositions for source criticism on pp. 123–24 and for form criticism on pp. 162–63. I number them 1–10. Law listed numbers 1–3 for source criticism and 4–10 for form criticism. The sentences in italics below are quotes from Law on these pages.

1. *Authors have a consistent style.* This ignores things like chronological change in a single individual's writing style; literary genre; stereotypical and deliberately archaizing language; deliberate allusions. It also ignores cultural communicative issues like register.

2. *Authors do not intentionally contradict themselves.* Contradictions are therefore due to different sources. Anyone who has ever had to grade essays or read research too quickly published knows that single authors can very well contradict themselves, though usually unintentionally. It also begs the question of universal understandings of coherence and contradiction.

3. *Interruptions in the flow of narrative or argument are evidence of different sources.* This assumes a postprint criterion of narrative flow. In practice, source critics tend to ignore stylistic features common to residual orality (repetition, digression, lists, etc.), imposing on the sources modern aesthetic ideals.

4. *Biblical writings have been constructed out of smaller units.* As a general statement, sure, why not. In practice, however, this has been taken as a license to dissect everything into tiny chunks based on the minutest differences in style. This is because of assumption number one above, already stated to be incorrect. Moreover, each text must be taken separately on its own. Even if one biblical book was compiled from three hundred sources, that would not mean there might not be others that were not.

5. *Written texts were preceded by a period of oral tradition.* This derives from Hermann Gunkel's unfortunate misunderstanding of early folkloric studies (particularly Axel Olrik) and his followers' subsequent misuse of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord.²² Orality does not work like written texts do, and people cannot transmit verbatim chunks unchanged for millennia as if they were memorized texts. Oral forms can and do encourage very extensive amounts of memorization, but except for very specific types of genres, it is themes, forms, formula, and narratives that are preserved,

22. E.g., Hermann Gunkel's essay "Fundamental Problems of Hebrew Literary History," in *What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays*, trans. A. K. Dallas (repr. London: Allen & Unwin, 1928), 57–68. See Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Lord was Parry's doctoral student. He participated in Parry's fieldwork in Yugoslavia and continued it after his death. Susan Niditch was/is a student of Lord (Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, LAI [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996]).

not verbatim sentences. Further, only “primary orality” precedes written texts; “residual orality” persists alongside writing.²³

6. *Oral tradition necessitates forms that are easy to memorize.* This is true—Walter J. Ong has called this the need to “think memorable thoughts”—but only for the form and formulas.²⁴ Biblical scholars have tended to misunderstand the formulas as discussed by Parry and Lord; they were merely mechanisms for easing extemporaneous composition of longer recitations, not for verbatim memorization of long passages.²⁵ Exceptions are things like proverbs, but even there it is important to recognize that they tend to exist with multiple synchronic and diachronic variants. It is writing that enables and encourages *verbatim* memorization.

7. *Material is grouped by theme not chronology.* This depends on the genre. But in general, strict chronology is impossible without writing.

8. *Biblical writers were not authors in the modern sense.* This phrase is pregnant with difficulties. It is important to note that human creators relate differently to the material they create both diachronically and synchronically, in intention and in cultural expectations.²⁶ Nonetheless, this is not something that can be easily used to dismiss the context of creation in favor of “compilers and editors” as Law does. Instead, one must grapple with what a culture understood creation or authorship to be.

9. *It is possible to trace the oral prehistory of forms.* Without ethnographic observation, this is impossible. One can try to understand the general types of oral genres that may have been in use on the basis of extant data (such as obvious ones like proverbs), but one cannot dissect written texts for prewritten forms. Writing by nature changes the genre.²⁷

10. *Forms originated in a particular cultural, social, or religious milieu.* Insofar as that is taken to mean all human communication, then yes. How-

23. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (repr. London: Routledge, 2004). Ong speaks of three forms of orality: primary, residual, and secondary.

24. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

25. “But if the reader interprets oral learning as listening to something repeated in exactly the same form many times, if he equates it with oral memorization by rote, then he will fail to grasp the peculiar process involved in learning oral epic. The same may be said for oral composition” (Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 5).

26. I already argued this in Jason M. Silverman, “Pseudepigraphy, Anonymity, and Auteur Theory,” *Religion and the Arts* 15 (2011): 520–55.

27. See the work of Dell Hymes, *In Vain I Tried to Tell You”: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

ever, no genre or form is ever restricted to only one *Sitz im Leben*. Genres are primarily cultural shorthands for the interpretation of a given communication, and they cannot be divorced from the medium in which they occur.²⁸ What this means is that the use of a genre within a text that originated in another context cannot simply be used to infer that the passage in question derived from the supposed original context of the borrowed genre. It only means the author or editor responsible found the cultural cues of that genre useful for what they wished to do with it; the passage in question may or may not have preceded this usage.

If all of these presuppositions are incorrect, then it follows that any method built upon them is fatally flawed. I do not question the compilation of sources, their editing, or their chronological change over time, the very basic underpinning of the historical-critical method. What we need, however, are methods that take into account both external historical evidence for communication and sociologically plausible ways for reading them. We also have to admit when it is impossible for us to reconstruct the details of the history of a text—and thus compensate for this in historical argumentation.

In addition to the problematic assumptions listed by Law, users of these methods often use theological assumptions to make historical claims. The classical assumption is one of canonical relationships: that texts that are now biblical *have to have been influenced by other biblical texts*. This leads some scholars to search for all language similarities within the various texts that happen to survive in the present canons and to interpret any parallels found as *causally* related. This is a classic circular argument: underneath lies an assumption that texts now in the Hebrew Bible were written to be Scripture and that thus subsequent writers automatically used them as such. The canonical links discovered by exegetes are then used to reinforce the assumption that the texts were already Scripture. This is a circle of *theological* reasoning that continues to be presented as if it were historiography.²⁹

28. See Jason M. Silverman, "Achaemenid Sources and the Problem of Genre," in *Conceptualizing Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger, Melammu Symposia 9 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018), 261–78.

29. As I noted earlier in a review of Mark J. Boda, *Exploring Zechariah 2: The Development and Role of Biblical Traditions in Zechariah*, ANEM 17 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), see J. M. Silverman, review of *Exploring Zechariah 2*, by Mark J. Boda, *RBL* (2019): <https://www.sblcentral.org/home/bookDetails/11662>. For example, Boda uses a posited dependency on Jeremiah in Zechariah to argue that Persian Yehud

Arguments of this type and other similarly theological reasonings often appear for historical critics' posited emendations and redactions. Certainly, over time, as groups developed canons, scribes began to edit manuscripts accordingly; this is not, however, a valid warrant for projecting such processes endlessly into earlier periods.

I will close with a statement regarding my own presuppositions, to be transparent. I consider myself a historian (of religion) who happens to use biblical texts as evidence. However, I was first trained in communication studies (rather than biblical studies or history). I am also an Anglican, which is a tradition that admittedly emphasizes history over theology. The reader can judge how much these parameters determine my own presuppositions.

2.2. Responses

2.2.1. Juha Pakkala: First Response

There is no question that literary-critical method should be improved and better anchored in documented text-critical evidence. Textual evolution was more fragmentary than many critics assume, but it does not diminish the method's potential contribution to understanding history. Regardless of whether added by a redactor revising the entire composition or by successive scribes, the addition of priests and Levites in Ezra-Nehemiah implies a rising role of these groups in the context where this textual tradition was transmitted. The same applies to the appearance of other concepts, topics, and phenomena in later additions (e.g., image prohibition, monolatrous conceptions, Sabbath, the Purim festival, covenant theology, the law, purity issues). They are significant contributions to understanding the development of concepts in early Judaism. Without this evidence, the information would be lost since other sources in particular for concepts are scanty.

Some sources behind biblical texts are very difficult to identify, while others are not. Pentateuchal sources are a much-disputed area, but one

experienced a crisis in leadership. This is a historical-political claim, but it is predicated on an assumption of Jeremiah and Ezekiel functioning as authoritative already, rather than political evidence. We do not in fact know that either (or any!) text was already functioning as Scripture at this time (Persian era). He admits the theological context for his work on p. 197.

should not overlook other, widely recognized sources, for example, city lists (e.g., in Josh 19), royal annals (in Kings), administrative lists (e.g., the governors list in 1 Kgs 4:7–19), early poems (e.g., the Song of Deborah in Judg 5), and other early sources (e.g., the Succession Narrative in 2 Sam 9–20). Disagreements among scholars and challenges to identify every word with certainty do not render futile the study of these important sources, which significantly contributed to the understanding of early Israel and Judaism's history. Borchardt rightly notes that stories which are largely invented, such as Josiah's reform, should not be used as a framework for interpreting the development of concepts, but this applies to any approach in biblical studies. The inconsistent or uncritical position of some scholars toward sources is irrelevant for discussing the method's validity. Literary critics are unlikely to be especially well represented among biblical scholars who uncritically use biblical stories, some of which are largely invented.

Uncertainty and subjective interpretation are involved in all human sciences, but ancient history is particularly challenging because sources are scanty and difficult to interpret. Contradictory or uncertain theories, the method's poor application, and fragmentary sources do not undermine literary criticism as a method as such. An all-or-nothing attitude and a need for certainty is hardly possible for any issues in the study of ancient history. Championing a similar expectation of other methods or approaches would eventually lead to historical nihilism and the adoption of even more subjective approaches such as the aesthetic values of texts, as suggested by Borchardt.

Silverman certainly makes provocative claims about historical-critical methods, but they are largely unsubstantiated and misguided. The Hebrew Bible is exceptional as literature and as a historical source, and therefore special methods had to be developed to tackle its problems. The same methods may not be applicable to all ancient literature, and many other sources have special issues as well.³⁰ Silverman mentions a number of criteria (somewhat misleadingly termed presuppositions), which should be seen as rough guidelines and not as strict indicators to be used mechanically. It is more important to have a deep understanding of the text and its sociocultural background. Space allows addressing only those points that are directly relevant for literary criticism.

30. For example, the conquest accounts of the Pharaohs have special characteristics that are dependent on their context. This observation recommends caution when making analogies between different cultures, times, and texts in different languages.

1. Literary critics should certainly recognize that an author may change his style in a text and even deliberately archaize his writing style. For example, despite different styles and even language, many of the alleged documents in Ezra-Nehemiah are probably from the same author as the surrounding text (e.g., Ezra 7:11–26, written in Aramaic). The imitation of an older style has been a powerful tool to increase the authority of a text (e.g., Book of Mormon; Song of the Sea in Exod 15). Deliberate allusions are also generally acknowledged. For example, Deuteronomism is a widespread phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible and beyond and cannot be mechanically connected with a certain period.³¹

2. Inconsistency is common in writing and speaking, but a clear contradiction should be noted. It does not necessarily indicate different authors; one should not make far-reaching conclusions because of one contradiction. However, several contradictions make a probable case, such as in the flood story (Gen 6–9; e.g., the length of the flood, 40 or 150 days). This theory does not stand on contradictions only but also on different writing style, vocabulary, expressions, and peculiar repetitions. The theory of two sources is probable until a better explanation emerges.

3. An author can interrupt and digress from the main topic—in modern and ancient literature alike. A thematic digression alone is a poor basis for assuming a different author, but if the language, concepts, and terminology also differ, there should be an explanation for it. Two authors or the use of a source may not be the only possible explanation, but it is a possibility, and in the end the most probable theory should be adopted.

4. A general presupposition that biblical texts have been constructed out of smaller units is clearly problematic. Early research started by assuming single authors, but critical observations (including text-critical evidence) led to the assumption of multiple authors or layers in many texts and not vice versa.

Silverman's list of "invalid presuppositions" contains a caricature portrayal of historical critics as simple fools who mechanically follow some guidelines without even understanding the texts they study. But are there real-world examples? Silverman uses biblical texts as historical evidence in his own studies, but it remains unclear how he solves the problem of multilayered texts methodologically. Methods successfully used elsewhere

31. See, e.g., Thomas Römer, "Deuteronomismus," WiBiLex—Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013), <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/16353/>.

may not be directly applicable to such texts. For a historical critic, his position appears to stand on clay feet. Borchardt's approach gives the initial impression of more methodological coherence, but it implies selective historical nihilism where literary-critical approaches are seen as unnecessarily problematic and their achievements are ignored. Taking resort with text-forms and their differences for perceived audiences, as Borchardt suggests, somehow belongs to the *zeitgeist* in biblical studies, but these are different research areas with their own questions and problems.

2.2.2. Francis Borchardt: First Response

After reading through the statement papers, it has become clear that there are two broadly aligned perspectives represented in this forum. In one camp, Silverman and I share a deep concern about the ability of the historical-critical method to accomplish what it sets out to do on the basis of its presuppositions and processes. On the other side, Pakkala and Edenburg recognize some of the limitations of the historical-critical method but insist on its necessity for using the Bible as a historical source. Numerous distinctions in each author's rhetoric and approach are evident, but there are clearly recognizable trajectories of accordance among the two parties. Therefore the bulk of my response will focus on the statement papers of Pakkala and Edenburg.

One prominent point of debate raised by both Edenburg and Pakkala relates to the objectivity, replicability, and scientific credentials of the historical-critical method. In raising this topic, they anticipate a critique neither Silverman nor I make. I cannot speak for Silverman, but for me it is because I am not concerned about objectivity of this or other methods as such, although I am interested in how any discipline works to establish the value of its findings through its institutions and processes. It is from this latter perspective that I would like to address the topic.

When they defend the historical-critical method against accusations of subjectivity, Edenburg and Pakkala do so using two distinct rhetorical strategies. For her part, Edenburg first employs a *tu quoque* counterattack wherein she argues that the claims concerning the lack of replicability and consensus rarely if ever have any data to back them up. She suggests that such a claim demands a controlled trial wherein scholars using the same historical-critical tools are provided with the same text and asked to analyze it to produce evidence of editorial activity. Edenburg goes on to argue that the speculative nature of the historical-critical method is not a

quality that makes it unscientific. She counters that speculation is a necessary step to forming hypotheses that can then be subjected to falsification tests. She adds that this is as true of astrophysics as it is for philosophy. Edenburg concludes with a challenge to critics of historical criticism, asking why speculation is tolerable in other disciplines, but not in biblical studies. Taken together, Edenburg's approach amounts to a defense of the scientific credentials of the historical-critical method. It then proceeds to argue for the necessity of historical criticism for doing any kind of historical research on biblical texts, presumably because a failure to do so violates the practice recommended by Leopold von Ranke, which I addressed in my statement paper.

Edenburg's defense is distinct from but reaches the same conclusion as Pakkala in his statement paper. Rather than maintaining the objectivity and scientific status of the historical-critical method, Pakkala acknowledges that all human sciences produce uncertain and conjectural conclusions. He thereby constructs a divide between the type of knowledge that can be produced in human sciences like ancient history and biblical studies, and the kind of surety that can be achieved in empirical and natural sciences. Yet, even as he does so, Pakkala commends historical-critical methods for the clarity of their criteria, which, for him, makes these approaches more falsifiable. He concludes that even though historical-critical methods are not able to achieve the same type of results as empirical sciences, they are still necessary to attain any sources that can be used in historical or literary analysis. Pakkala's rhetorical approach at once acknowledges the truth of the criticism and slinks past it by suggesting that historical-critical approaches are more like scientific methods than any other theory employed in biblical studies and therefore have greater value.

Edenburg and Pakkala converge in two important areas: (1) they bristle against the seemingly unfair treatment of the historical-critical method when compared to other approaches; and (2) they conclude that because these criticisms appear to be unfair to historical criticism in various ways, they are insufficient for removing historical criticism from a privileged, even foundational status in the field. Both scholars never fully investigate or address the connection between these two parts of their argument. There are clear sociological and historical reasons for which historical criticism has become a target in the field of biblical studies. These reasons are entirely related to the types of claims that both Edenburg and Pakkala make for historical criticism in the landscape of approaches available to biblical scholars.

For the vast majority of biblical scholarship in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, historical criticism has enjoyed a privileged place in the field. This privilege can be seen from the early distinctions between higher criticism (i.e., historical-critical approaches) and lower criticism (i.e., text-critical approaches; however, see the first footnote in Pakkala's statement paper). The privilege can also be observed in almost any book produced on method and theory in biblical studies up through today. Historical-critical approaches often enjoy pride of place in such volumes, with some textbooks, such as the ubiquitous *Exegese des Alten Testaments: Leitfaden der Methodik* by Odil Hannes Steck,³² covering only these approaches. But it does not stop there. Courses in biblical studies routinely introduce historical-critical conclusions as the primary content of the class, and masters and doctoral students must demonstrate proficiency in these methods in particular in order to be considered for graduation. That is not commonly true of any other method used in biblical studies. The reason for this is that, in many institutions around the world, in order to even be considered for a position in biblical studies one must show oneself to be a capable practitioner of historical-critical approaches.

In short, historical criticism has, and in many ways still does, present itself as normal, as value-neutral scholarship. In that sense, historical criticism's self-presentation places itself outside of or above criticism. Its method and conclusions become objective fact. That is not a position that has been shared by any other method or theory. Those are constantly questioned, marginalized, and dismissed in all sorts of venues. Gatekeepers among journal reviewers, hiring committees, and conference organizers continually work to minimize the impact of methods and theories they find problematic. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Methods and theories that form the epistemological framework for scholarship in any discipline should be the subject of criticism. They should be subjected to questioning and judgment. This is as true of historical-critical approaches as it is of feminist theory. As Edenburg and Pakkala note, that does appear to be happening, however slowly.

This also means that the complaints that Edenburg and Pakkala are making are a reaction to having historical-critical approaches subjected to the same kind of critique that all other approaches have always experienced. The

32. Odil Hannes Steck, *Exegese des Alten Testaments: Leitfaden der Methodik, ein Arbeitsbuch für Proseminare, Seminare und Vorlesungen*, 14th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999).

questioning of historical criticism is merely part of a process that is removing this basket of approaches from a place of unquestioned privilege and replacing it alongside other methods and theories used in biblical studies. It is no longer an unquestioned fact but interrogated on its claims. Among those claims, as demonstrated by both Edenburg and Pakkala, is a self-presentation as empirical scientific truth. Pakkala even acknowledges this briefly in his statement paper. So, it is not only fair but necessary to interrogate that claim specifically, precisely because it is one not made, and certainly not institutionalized for other methods in the field of biblical studies. By focusing on this aspect of critique in their statement papers, Edenburg and Pakkala perform exactly why such a critique is called for. Their response is akin to that made by some men in an environment that increasingly attempts to deconstruct male privilege. They experience the criticism as though they are being unfairly targeted, but they do not see that they are not being targeted at all. They are only being treated as others always have.

2.2.3. Jason M. Silverman: First Response

I agree with Pakkala's and Edenburg's comments about the logically necessary sequence for historical research: before one can analyze historical sources, one must first determine what the nature of those sources is. Traditionally, the historical-critical methods have claimed to be able to determine what historical sources lie within the veneer of the surviving versions. The problem, however, is that this tradition was developed without an adequate sociological grounding. A slightly unfair caricature of the traditional historical-critical method would be to call it the anachronistic retrojection of nineteenth-century Protestant scholarship onto ancient authors and scribes.

It is a truism to say that all thinking is always a product of its time, scholarship included. An example long noted is that the Wellhausen model of Israelite prophets was essentially a portrait of Luther. A similar critique can be leveled against the presuppositions underlying the way scholars have utilized the historical-critical tradition. In the final analysis such anachronism is, of course, unavoidable. One cannot escape one's own context. However, one of the things that a social-scientific approach ought to do is to provide some controls for our presuppositions about the ways humans do things, both now and in the past, by providing reasons for positing or rejecting models for how humans may or may not act in a given situation. Every scholar will always approach every source

with presuppositions—either consciously or unconsciously. By using the various social sciences, one can try to lay bare at least *some* of the presuppositions one uses in the analysis, as well as provide *empirical reasons for utilizing* those presuppositions.

Therefore, I would argue that, done properly, social-scientific approaches are not anything that one can simply tack on top of neutral textual analysis: they need to inform the very suppositions that one uses in the analysis in the first place. As I argued above, the presuppositions that the historical-critical tradition has used to determine the nature of the historical sources is based on faulty assumptions of how humans communicate. It is the use of the anthropology and ethnology of oral and residually oral traditions, among other approaches, that enables such a critique. By investigating the different ways poets, authors, and scribes interacted with their material historically and in modern times, one is able to see that their methods for working do not resemble the picture many historical critics have painted. Even if it is often not stated directly, the entire logical basis for using historical-critical methods is the assumption that they adequately reveal something about the mind-sets and working methods of ancient scribes. Research into the mind-sets and working methods of scribes, however, itself *requires more than the biblical text alone or methods developed solely for those texts*. The issue at stake is not one of speculation, but of assumptions, controls for those assumptions, and evidence-based reasons for interpreting any given features in the texts.

To push this further, many of the textual features that one uses in literary analysis are, in reality, socially determined features. Language in any medium is, of course, a social construct, and it cannot be adequately understood divorced from the society that utilized it. The most obvious case in point is the abused concept of genre and its supposed *Sitz im Leben*. Even though we are in a habit of treating genres merely as a stylistic device, genres actually are subtle cultural-hermeneutical codes that signal to the audience how the communication should be interpreted. The codes, and the ways they are interpreted, change through time; understanding these meanings and changes in meaning requires more than literary analysis alone. This extra literary analysis is, in fact, integral to the literary job of analyzing a text that uses a genre or genres. The various claims about the supposed *Sitz im Leben* of particular forms is symptomatic of misrecognizing the socially embedded nature of literature itself. A similar set of considerations attends issues like language register, idioms, poetic styles, allusions, and the like. The heart of my

comments, therefore, is this: literary history is itself part of social history, and therefore it cannot be studied in splendid isolation.

There are two more aspects stemming from Pakkala's and Edenburg's comments above with which I would like to mark complete agreement, however. First, I agree with the methodological position that various types of evidence need to be analyzed on their own terms before attempts at synthesizing them. This is the corollary of needing to assess the nature of one's sources and what types of questions those sources can and cannot answer. For texts like those in the Hebrew Bible, this often will mean it is unwise to make firm historical claims on the basis of any given single word or passage.

Nonetheless, all types of evidence can be analyzed with a variety of methods, and this is true both before and after any attempted synthesis of different types of evidence. Even literary analysis itself is enriched and, I would argue, improved, by attention to some newer methodologies. Iconographic analysis provides more historically contextual ways to read images and metaphors in the text; ritual studies can provide new ways to consider repetitions, archaic language, and disjunctions in texts, as well as reasons for redactions; social-scientific approaches provide tests for assumptions.

The second point I find fruitful is Pakkala's chart of options for dealing with the Hebrew Bible that he offered above. Accepting that the texts have developed over time is a methodological conundrum, and a number of contemporary solutions to it are problematic. I think, however, the conclusions that I draw from the puzzle are different. He means this diagram to show that the only coherent choice is refining the methods of historical criticism. I tend to think the current methods are so flawed that the required refinements would be so radical that still calling them the historical-critical method would be disingenuous. This was a problem with which I wrestled in my last book and for which I have no real solution.³³ However, as Borchardt argued above, we need to be very clear and careful concerning what a given method, or indeed text, has the potential to tell us.

Lastly, I would also like to note that the methods one uses should be determined by the questions one wishes to ask. I wish to ask historical ques-

33. Jason M. Silverman, *Persian Royal–Judaean Elite Engagements in the Early Teispid and Achaemenid Empire: The King's Acolytes*, LHBOTS 690 (London: T&T Clark, 2019). Though in practice at the moment, from Pakkala's perspective, I vacillate between historical nihilism (I would prefer a term such as *minimalism*) and using the text as a witness for later periods.

tions (mostly about the Persian Empire). If one wished to ask questions about the later reception of the text, other methods that take the codified versions of the text as the basis would of course be more appropriate.

2.2.4. Cynthia Edenburg: Response

Borchardt's and Silverman's comments mount a programmatic attack on the foundations and purpose of historical criticism. Each ultimately admits that biblical books are compilations of different types of source materials that have undergone stages of editing and change over time. Nevertheless, they think that the historical conclusions arrived at by practitioners of literary criticism are invalid because they find different aspects of the method to be faulty. But the critiques by both Silverman and Borchardt are based upon misrepresentations of the method, as I outline below.

Silverman interacts with one select and admittedly simplified introduction to the historical-critical method and then argues that the literary-critical criteria presented there are all invalid, and thus the method as a whole is invalid.³⁴ Silverman's criticism of the basic premises of historical criticism (points 1, 2, 3, 4) is cast in generalities that are subject to falsification. While a full programmatic essay would provide the best response to Silverman's arguments, due to the constraints of the format here, I must limit my comments to a few important points.

1. By focusing solely on the representation of the method in Law's book, Silverman overlooks important criteria not represented there, such as historical linguistics and statistical stylistics. While it is true that an author's style may evolve in the course of her or his career, it is unlikely that one whose prose is characteristically verbose—with sentences that run up to 150 words—will suddenly adopt a concise style without the intervention of an editor, unless the concise style was taken up from a preexisting source or model. This is all the more true when a concisely worded text suddenly switches to an elaborate style featuring complex subordination and lengthy nominal clauses. Although the diachronic implications of

34. See Law, *The Historical-Critical Method*, viii: "This book is a conscious attempt to simplify these methods as much as possible.... For the sake of providing the reader with as clear an introduction as possible to the different methods employed in Historical Criticism, I have simplified and 'streamlined' the presentation." Furthermore, according to Law's research profile, he is far from a practitioner of the historical-critical method himself, see <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/persons/david.r.law>.

style change have been debated, there is widespread consensus that evidence for Late Biblical Hebrew within a literary context that is generally Standard Biblical Hebrew is a sure indicator of later scribal intervention.³⁵

2. Silverman overlooks the cognitive triggers that can inhibit smooth surface reading of a text. Already in antiquity, such triggers motivated creative interpretation and Midrash. The perception of triggering phenomena in the received text is not a modern mirage, but it troubled readers for more than two thousand years.³⁶ For contemporary critics, synchronic reading provides the starting point for understanding the text, and the suspicion that the text is not of one piece arises when the attempt at a smooth surface reading continually breaks down.³⁷ At this point the reader forms a hypothesis regarding the nature of the text, its unevenness, and its significance; and this hypothesis is put to the test of substantiation by other points of the text, such as its language, structure, and point of view. In fact, contemporary critics acknowledge the provisional nature of the hypothesis and the need to falsify alternate explanations.³⁸

3. In practice, no single criterion alone provides a basis for a convincing argument that a given text has been successively reworked or edited.

35. For recent discussion of historical linguistics and statistical stylistics in biblical Hebrew with reference to previous literature, see the essays by Erhard Blum (303–25), William M. Schniedewind (345–56), and Frank H. Polak (443–75) in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid, FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

36. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 9–11.

37. See, e.g., John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 22; Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, 2nd ed., trans. James D. Nogalski, RBS 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 47; Erhard Blum, “Notwendigkeit und Grenzen historischer Exegese; Plädoyer für eine alttestamentliche ‘Exegetik,’” in *Theologie und Exegese des Alten Testaments / der Hebräischen Bibel: Zwischenbilanz und Zukunftsperspektiven*, ed. Bernd Janowski, SBS 200 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005), 5; Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 62–63; Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments*, 55–56, 60–61.

38. Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 7; Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 58–59; Blum, “Notwendigkeit und Grenzen,” 16–18; see also Erhard Blum, “Von der Notwendigkeit einer disziplinären Selbstverständigung in der Exegese des Alten Testaments,” in *Exegetik des Alten Testaments: Bausteine für eine Theorie der Exegese*, ed. Joachim J. Krause and Kristin Weingart, FAT 2/127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 239–42.

Instead, the plausibility of a diachronic explanation is related to the *clustering* of phenomena relating to *different* criteria within a limited textual context.³⁹ The dismissal of a complex method on the basis of objections expressed in generalities is questionable. To illustrate this, I shall examine in depth just one of Silverman's points, namely that analysis of texts on the basis of style change is not justified since authors do not necessarily adhere to a consistent style. The fact that literarily competent authors can deliberately combine styles and genre in a single work might support Silverman's objection. However, the parade examples for the manipulation of stylistic variation are few and mostly limited to the modern period.⁴⁰ Some notable exceptions can be found in early modern prose narrative, which was experimenting with form.⁴¹ Even uninitiated readers who encounter the type of stylistic variation employed by James Joyce immediately become aware of an incongruity that they perceive as a foreign manipulation of the text. In other words, even if readers of Joyce's *Ulysses* have no recourse to the critical notes on the work, they sense that Joyce is emulating a series of other sources.⁴² More often than not, stylistic variation is limited to direct speech where it is employed by authors who wish to characterize different characters according to the style of their speech. The upshot of these points is that prior to the twentieth century most authors did, in fact, adhere to a consistent style.

39. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 54–56; Blum, “Notwendigkeit und Grenzen,” 15–17; Blum, “Von der Notwendigkeit,” 3, 21–25.

40. Intentional stylistic variation and combination of genres occurs throughout James Joyce's *Ulysses* but is particularly evident in the chapters “Cyclops,” which is a continuous dialogue interspersed by long and incongruous lists and catalogs of names, clergy, Irish sites, and more; “Oxen of the Sun,” which is a chronological pastiche of styles with a new parody in almost every paragraph, beginning with Latin prose style and continuing through the centuries down to Dickens and contemporary Irish slang and dialect; and “Circe,” which is written as a theatrical script.

41. Compare, for example, the parody of scholastic diction in the oration inserted into the Wittenberg passage of Thomas Nash's *The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jack Wilton* (1594), and the lengthy sermon read by Corporal Trim in volume 2, chapter 17 of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767). It is telling that literary theorists frequently compare Joyce with the early experiments in the novel form by Rabelais, Cervantes, and Sterne. In other words, extensive stylistic variation is exceptional and experimental and hardly the norm.

42. Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 105–6.

Borchardt takes a different tack; rather than eschewing the principles of historical-literary criticism, he suggests that the validity of the conclusions offered by its practitioners is far more limited than they claim. In his view, due to the number of uncertainties inherent to the endeavor, literary criticism is not capable of producing new information regarding the historical backgrounds for the composition of biblical works. Instead, he seems to call for a return to the New Criticism that prevailed in American literary theory during the 1950s, which highlighted the place of texts as artifacts independent of the historical contexts that produced them. However, a few points in his argument are problematic.

1. Borchardt concludes, upon the basis of work by Müller and Pakkala, that the comparison of known manuscripts and versions of literary works does not support the idea of broad scribal revision. However, their test cases comprised relatively small passages ranging between one verse to two chapters.⁴³ They themselves are cognizant of the wider implications of their research, particularly with regard to the early stages of editing that preceded the earliest preserved witnesses as well as the continuing process of editing, as documented by the Temple Scroll, 4QSam^a and 11QPs^a.⁴⁴ Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern sources indeed provide documented cases of broad editing of whole compositions, as can be seen in the Gilgamesh Epic, the Laws of Hammurabi, the Hittite Laws, the recensions of Neo-Assyrian annals and other royal inscriptions, and the rewriting and reorientation in the Assyrian recension of Enuma Elish.⁴⁵

43. Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*.

44. See, e.g., Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala, "Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East," in Müller and Pakkala, *Insights into Editing*, 4–7.

45. On the Gilgamesh Epic, see Jeffrey Tigay, "Summary: The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic," in *Gilgamesh: A Reader*, ed. John R. Maier (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1997), 41–49; and Tzvi Abusch, "Mourning the Death of a Friend: Some Assyriological Notes," in Maier, *Gilgamesh*, 109–21. On the Laws of Hammurabi, see Tzvi Abusch, "'He Should Continue to Bear the Penalty of that Case': An Interpretation of Codex Hammurabi Paragraphs 3–4 and 13," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Nahum M. Sarna, BJS 159 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 77–96; Victor A. Hurowitz, *Inu Anum Širum: Literary Structures in the Non-Juridical Sections of Codex Hammurabi*, Occasional Publication of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 15 (Philadelphia, PA: University Museum, 1994). On the Hittite Laws, see Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd

2. Borchardt infers from Müller and Pakkala's work that "changes to the content, extent, and shape of literary works primarily happen on a small scale without a dominant ideological or aesthetic program governing their introduction." It is true that any act of copying a scroll could invite a literarily competent scribe to make sporadic changes without intending to produce a coherent ideologically motivated redaction, and this does challenge the profiles proposed for the numerous Deuteronomistic redactions, such as DtrN, DtrP, DtrB. At the same time, interrelating texts that stand out from their context by virtue of style change and narrative disjuncture can indicate a broad editorial intent, particularly when these textual interconnections cross scrolls and impart structure to a large corpus, as occurs with the motifs of Joseph's bones (Gen 50:25; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32) and removing the foreign gods at Shechem (Gen 35:2–4; Josh 24:20–23),⁴⁶ as well as the interconnections between Judg 19–21 and 1:1–2:5.⁴⁷

3. According to Borchardt, "Practitioners of historical criticism claim that its *raison d'être* is a Rankean demand to get back to the real primary sources, so that they can reconstruct history 'how it actually was.'" This type of historical positivism has long been laid to rest. Contemporary scholars neither claim that primary sources are recoverable by means of literary historical criticism, nor do they view the Bible as a repository of primary sources. Instead, they recognize that the genres of biblical literature are far removed from those of the primary sources known throughout the ancient Near East. If the critic recognizes that the characteristics of the

ed., WAW 6 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 214–15. On annals and inscriptions, see See, e.g., Louis D. Levine, "The Second Campaign of Sennacherib," *JNES* 32 (1973): 312–17; A. Kirk Grayson, "History and Historians of the Ancient Near East: Assyria and Babylonia," *Or* 49 (1980): 164–68; Frederick Mario Fales, "A Literary Code in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Case of Ashurbanipal's Egyptian Campaigns," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis*, ed. Frederick Mario Fales, OAC 17 (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1981), 169–202; John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 62–64. On the Enuma Elish, see Piotr Michalowski, "Presence at the Creation," in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller, HSS 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 389–92.

46. See, e.g., Blum, "Von der Notwendigkeit," 26.

47. See Cynthia Edenburg, *Dismembering the Whole (Judg 19–21): Composition and Purpose of the Story of the Outrage at Gibeah*, AIL 24 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 301–12.

source mark it as fiction (such as the Joseph novella, the so-called Succession History, and the History of David's Rise), then it will be clear that the source can only attest to the concerns of certain scribal schools at the time of the composition. This insight was indeed new in the 1970s when Thompson's and Van Seters's studies of the patriarchal stories caused a stir, but now nearly all scholars comprehend the vast difference between the world portrayed in the text and the world that produced the text.⁴⁸ Even a conservative scholar such as John Barton stated recently,

The interest of biblical scholars of the critical school has not been uniformly in either the earliest or the latest stages in the composition of the biblical texts, but has varied as among different books. It is perhaps only in the case of the classical prophets that there has been a serious concentration on the words of the original prophet.⁴⁹

4. Borchardt criticizes the tendency to relate the composition of large bodies of texts to supposed key stages in the history of Judah and Samaria, such as Josiah's reform, the exile, and the postexilic restoration. Borchardt rightly points out that the mythic representation of these biblical events casts doubt upon the soundness of the search for neat classification of historical contexts. However, this objection overlooks the findings in archaeological and historical research of the last twenty-five years. The reform attributed to Josiah might be mythic, but *de facto* centralization was one of the upshots of the ravaging of Judah's territory outside Jerusalem eighty years earlier during Sennacherib's campaign. This conclusion is supported by the archaeological record as well as by Neo-Assyrian sources. Documentation also exists for the withdrawal of Assyria from its holdings in the Levant during the reign of Josiah, and findings from layers from the period at archaeological sites in southern Samaria attest to some diffusion of elements that are particularly characteristic of Judean material culture. Whether Josiah conducted a cult reform or not, there is considerable extrabiblical evidence for the political disposition of Judah during the last quarter of the seventh century, which presents a *plausible* background for the construction of Judean national myths relating to the conquest of the

48. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, BZAW 133 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

49. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 31–68.

land, dynasty, and the role of its royal temple.⁵⁰ So, too, the convergence of different types of evidence for the Babylonian (so-called exilic) period and the Persian period (so-called return or restoration) allows scholars to make informed judgments regarding plausible social and historical contexts in which scribes operated when producing literary compositions. The main point to remember is that we are talking about plausibility rather than factual certainty and that alternate scenarios need to be considered and weighed before judging which is the most convincing background for the production of any given text.

To conclude, it is true that there are limits to the method and that many cases defy decisive analysis and relative dating. For example, the account of David's wanderings 1 Sam 21:12–26:25 has David change location at least fourteen times, but his itinerary lacks any noticeable progression, narrative cohesion, or geographic logic. While the cumulative effect of David's erratic movements and Saul's pursuit is that of a cat and mouse game, the miscellaneous elements loosely joined together by means of the itinerary of David's wanderings indicate that the section comprises a conglomeration of material that was added to the David story over several stages. It is impossible to fully reconstruct the stages of growth in the depiction of David's wanderings, nor is it possible (or desirable) to ascribe all the accretions to distinct redactional layers that could be characterized and labeled. In cases like this, the fact that an obvious conglomerate text defies neat historical-critical analysis does not mean that the method is broken but rather that in given cases there is not sufficient evidence to base a diachronic judgment. We need to remember that all critical methods are a means to construct hypotheses that are subject to falsification, and all hypotheses are provisional, although a hypothesis that is supported by various avenues of evidence will withstand criticism better than a hypothesis which is dependent on one single observation.

Finally, historical criticism is necessary if we have any interest in achieving a fuller understanding of the biblical texts. To paraphrase Erhard Blum: if we eschew the pursuit of historical criticism and invalidate its literary-critical

50. See, e.g., Nadav Na'aman, "The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research," *ZAW* 107 (1995): 179–95; Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," in *Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors, Interaction and Counteraction* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 372–79; Na'aman, "The King Leading Cult Reforms in His Kingdom: Josiah and Other Kings in the Ancient Near East," *ZABR* 12 (2006): 136–42, 164–68.

criteria, then many biblical texts will elude understanding of their structure, genre, significance and purpose.⁵¹ Neither Silverman nor Borchardt offer an alternative to historical criticism, although one could surmise that they think that reception history should provide the starting point for the academic study of biblical literature. Indeed, biblical texts do have a long history of interpretation, which is not true of most ancient Near Eastern literary texts. And yet scholars of ancient Near Eastern literature are less queasy than Silverman and Borchardt about inquiring into the purpose and historical context of compositions of texts like the *Enuma Elish*, the *Marduk Prophecy*, and many others. What holds for the study of cognate literature should surely continue to hold for biblical literature.

2.2.5. Juha Pakkala: Second Response

It is easy to agree with Silverman that external controls are needed for historical-critical theories. The critic should be familiar with all possible information that can illuminate an investigated text, and this includes results gained by social-scientific methods (e.g., dynamics and group interactions in societies). Familiarity with these methods cannot be expected of nineteenth-century scholars in retrospect, but twenty-first-century literary critics greatly benefit from them. Obviously, human sciences must base their research on how people think, communicate, and do things; new methods advance our understanding of these processes.

However, the special characteristics of each investigated source have to be recognized. In their *multilayered final forms*, the texts of the Hebrew Bible may not correspond to typical ways of doing things. For example, an author does not usually make syntactic mistakes or abruptly change style and language unless there is a clear reason for it. Because of inexplicably broken rules, scholarship has assumed exceptionally complicated literary histories behind biblical texts. Literary criticism was developed to deal with problems of multilayered texts. A crucial external control for understanding the characteristics of these texts is documented text-critical evidence that shows how scribes worked. These processes have to be understood before using these texts for historical purposes. Consequently, I warmly welcome the application and use of all information gained by social-scientific methods *during* literary-critical analyses. However, their

51. Blum, "Notwendigkeit und Grenzen," 20–21.

application to the final texts of the Hebrew Bible—stacking them on top without literary-critical analysis—would be methodologically hazardous.

Rather than addressing the methodological basis of historical criticism, its scientific viability, its achievements, and the implications of alternatives, Borchardt wants to discuss values. He insinuates that historical criticism is like a patriarchy whose defenders are whining about their crumbling privileges. This polarizing narrative with imposed terminology says more about his position than about that of historical critics. Some critics are surely inconsistent (“unfair” in Borchardt’s terminology), but contrary to Borchardt’s narrative, I strongly encourage the method to be interrogated on its methodological basis,⁵² because it is essential for the method’s renewal.

To be sure, changing interests in societies have *rightly* influenced biblical studies: new approaches, such as social-scientific methods, archaeology, and feminist theory, are now widely practiced in biblical studies. The value of different approaches is contingent on what we want to do with the texts, but not all methods are equally equipped for all tasks. Feminist theory, for example, is essential in highlighting gender inequalities and women’s roles in ancient history. Literary criticism is crucial for tackling the unusual problems of multilayered texts. There are numerous scientific approaches to the study of biblical texts, and it depends on the context which approaches are used (e.g., in faculties with a Protestant background the text itself and its theological conceptions have historically been central). I would not dare or have the expertise to evaluate feminist theory or social-scientific approaches as methods. My criticism is strictly limited to using exceptionally multilayered texts, those in the Hebrew Bible in particular, as historical sources without differentiating different authors, sources, or layers in them.

Clearly, if one studies reception histories or the aesthetic presentation of final versions, literary criticism would be unnecessary. In his statement paper, Borchardt suggests that historical critics should, instead of tending to their own field, use their expertise for such approaches. Although he criticizes historical critics for value judgments, his own position implies that historical criticism not only has lesser value but should not be practiced at all. It appears to me to be an ideological position that is propagated

52. See Pakkala, *God’s Word Omitted*, where I question a core assumption of literary criticism that nothing was omitted in the textual transmission.

by a selective narrative where the method's achievements are overlooked, and failures are highlighted.

2.2.6. Francis Borchartdt: Second Response

In both his statement paper and his first response, Pakkala insists that the Hebrew Bible is "unparalleled in world literature" and is "exceptional as literature and as a historical source." The context of these statements seems to suggest that the comments are tied to the process by which the works of the Hebrew Bible were composed, rather than to religious/ethnic exceptionalism, or literary quality. That is, Pakkala appears to argue that the ancient Jewish works that have been selected and transmitted within the context of a canon have undergone a special type of compositional process of "intensive scribal activity" when compared to other literary works and historical sources. He says this process "resulted in multilayered texts." While I largely agree with the process Pakkala describes, I disagree that it is exceptional among historical sources and literature. Moreover, I doubt that this process necessitates the methods for which Pakkala and Edenburg have argued.

The process of writing wherein works are continuously composed as they are transmitted is widely documented in most manuscript cultures. While in print and postprint culture, we have typically both realized and come to value facsimile reproduction in the circulation of written works; this was not the norm prior to print culture. The truth of this statement can be observed both from the material evidence (manuscripts) and the literary evidence (texts that explicitly depict or reflect upon the process of publication). One quickly observes from these types of evidence that works were continually changed when they were copied and that the changes introduced were thought to improve upon the works in some way. This is as true of literary works circulated in medieval European contexts as it is of works circulated in ancient Greece and Rome, and indeed as it is of ancient Jewish writings. In all of these situations the act of composition was not a one-time event but occurred every time a new manuscript was created for the purposes of copying an existing passage of another manuscript. Some parts of the existing text might be copied word for word, others sense for sense, others summarized, others omitted, and still other texts added in the production in the manuscript, all while ostensibly reproducing the work. There are certainly specific compositional practices that may have been more prominent in one setting or another (such as the

preservation of two versions of the same story in the same text in some pentateuchal texts, the epitomization of larger works in the Greco-Roman milieu, or the prominence of anthologization in Byzantine manuscripts), but the larger method of continuous composition is the same. So, the way in which works included in the Hebrew Bible were produced fits well within the parameters of manuscript culture more broadly.

Yet, when we look toward the ways in which literary and historical scholars engage the manuscripts in medieval European studies or in classical studies, we do not see much overlap with the historical-critical methods employed by some biblical scholars. In those fields, the response to the compositional nature of their works is very different. Although at different points in the history of their disciplines, the nineteenth-century methods that prevail in the historical-critical methods of biblical studies did hold sway, those fields have largely moved on from attending to those concerns. In medieval studies, scholars have placed their emphasis on the material features of each manuscript, its compositional situation and conditions of use, and interpretation of its text, rather than the notional work that text represents. This would seem to solve Edenburg and Pakkala's objections concerning literary studies but would not necessarily solve their problem for historical questions, due to the fact that most notionally complete biblical manuscripts come from a period some 1,000 to 1,500 years after they are thought to have been first composed. Classical studies do still engage in text criticism in certain corners of the field, but the philological scholarship there is usually ignored by classical historians, who evaluate their sources' utility for telling a story about the past without attempting to reconstruct an earlier written source. They instead use many of the critical questions Pakkala applies to works in order to reconstruct sources and stages of composition for different purposes. The classical historians ask these questions in order to determine whether and to what extent a specific statement in a written work might be a reliable witness of past events. So, we need to ask ourselves why these fields with works composed according to similar practices as those of ancient Judaism are not, or not any longer employing the methods Pakkala and Edenburg deem necessary. It may be that they have either become what Pakkala terms "historical nihilists" or that they are simply bad historians. But it may be that they examine and critique their sources in thoroughly distinct ways from their counterparts in biblical studies because they have found better ways to answer their questions.

2.2.7. Jason M. Silverman: Second Response

Perhaps my previous contributions to this discussion have been unclear, but in my estimation, the defenses of the historical-critical method posited here have missed the force of my intended critique. A current textbook on the method is a useful shorthand for pointing out operating assumptions that are not always made explicit by practitioners, and these assumptions are the key. They comprise how we can or should imagine people dealt with linguistic traditions over two millennia removed from us. Though we can, of course, never recreate the past, it is our duty to be self-critical in our reconstructions. Part of such reflection requires assessing background assumptions.⁵³

I do not mean to say that assumptions are bad—in fact, they are necessary and inevitable. Every criterion utilized (by any historian, critic, or analyst) is based on assumptions. These assumptions may be more or less empirically or theoretically grounded and thus more or less likely to be illuminating or obfuscating. It is my contention that the assumptions behind the way historical criticism is often practiced tend toward obfuscation, regardless of how any individual criterion is or is not deployed in a given analysis. Several of the responses to my initial objections replicate the assumptions I meant to highlight.

Pakkala rightfully notes that inconsistency need not mark different authors. But the entire endeavor of noting inconsistency begs the question of what *an ancient author would have considered to be consistent*. The textual feature that strikes the critic as inconsistent *remained in the text*. An author, or a series of compilers, editors, or subsequent copyists were content to leave it in place. Certainly, multiple authorship or diachronic growth are potential causes (though it still means someone in the chain of creation left it there). Nevertheless, the contemporary understanding of coherence must be evaluated before deciding it is in fact an inconsistency for its time. Further, humans differ in their perception of and tolerance for dissonance and have a cognitive bias toward consistency.⁵⁴ Even where

53. To echo Bourdieu, we could call this an invitation to reflexive historiography; see Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

54. Compare the entire phenomenon of cognitive dissonance where people hold what appear, to an outside perspective, to be contradictory things together. See Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory* (London:

incongruities are noticed, these need not always be considered significant by the producers themselves.⁵⁵ That later readers note inconsistencies has little bearing on what historical criticism intends to focus on: the *creation* of those inconsistencies themselves (if they are to be diagnostic for textual history). Appealing to midrash, as Edenburg does, only shows reactions to a text already containing such features, rather than offering a reason for their being in the text.

Edenburg also appeals to historical and statistical linguistics, which, I agree, would theoretically provide more solid grounds for at least a relative dating of passages. Unfortunately, the data set is in fact small from a computational point of view, plus a lack of securely dated, unedited manuscripts currently makes such attempts entirely dubious.⁵⁶ In this respect, the Hebrew corpus is quite different from the much larger Akkadian corpus, which likewise has many dated tablets and even colophons.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, this does not make it a corpus deserving of special treatment.

Another problematic point is the very understanding of ancient word-smiths—authors, compilers, editors, copyists—and the words we use to describe them. Historical critics are indeed concerned to elucidate these, but the same textual data can be colored differently (and thus imply a different historical process) by choosing diverse constellations of these terms. To use an example raised by Pakkala: Does the flood narrative contain a compiler's melding of two authors' versions, a second author's addition to another author's work, an amanuensis's blending of two different versions, or something else entirely? A decision on such a question does not

Sage, 2007); see also the famous study in the biblical field by Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury, 1979), or Edenburg's own appeal to cultural expectations in a recent article: Edenburg, "Falsifiable Hypotheses," 383–401, esp. 385.

55. Lord famously noted this with his Yugoslav poets, who knew that each performance was different, but saw it as irrelevant (*Singer of Tales*, 27–28). Edenburg herself ("Falsifiable Hypotheses," 385) notes that audiences have different reactions to the same details (but she does not allow for the possibility of not perceiving them as problems—by either modern or ancient authors/readers).

56. See Ian Young, Martin Ehrensverd, and Robert Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (London: Equinox, 2008); Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach*, ANEM 9 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

57. However, the issues concerning assumptions and methods apply as much to other literature as they do to the Hebrew Bible.

depend on the textual data themselves but on how the critic understands the ways ancient scribes operated. Certainly, all of them participated in the reception and passing on of traditions in various ways, but how they understood what they were doing and the media they used impacts what they did. As already noted above, it inherently impacts the assessment of coherence for any given work if we posit that someone was transcribing, retelling, or collating received material or was creating something new.⁵⁸

Both Pakkala and Edenburg insist that proper usage of the method entails cumulative cases using multiple criteria. They paint it like a court case, in which the prosecution builds up layers of evidence. This is, of course, good scientific method. However, the accumulation of dubiously founded observations does not make for a stronger case—it makes for an entirely misleading case, a castle in the sky without foundations, fit to be dismissed by the jury for being circumstantial or circular.

Neither the recognition that at present we do not have dated manuscripts for versions like some ancient Near Eastern literature nor the recognition that our assumptions need assessment imply an abandonment of history.⁵⁹ They imply we need better tools. They imply we need to evaluate our own historically contingent assumptions. And as discussants in any scholarly field, we need to be honest about the eloquence of the data available to us—even if that sometimes makes us quite minimalist.

2.3. Closing Comments

2.3.1. Cynthia Edenburg

All four participants in this debate agree that biblical texts have a lengthy composition history and that the initial form of most texts underwent various degrees of change throughout many generations and perhaps for hundreds of years. That said, there remains considerable disagreement between Pakkala and me, on the one side, and Silverman and Borchardt, on the other. Pakkala and I hold that historians need to consider literary compositions to be important historical sources relating to the cultural

58. Also already explained by Niditch, *Oral World*, 117–21.

59. See the articulation of the difference between accepting change and reconstructing that change in Ehud Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Obadiah*, BZAW 242 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 7 n. 12, though Ben-Zvi is further toward the final-text end of the debate.

and intellectual currents of scribal circles at their time of composition and that historical criticism provides a necessary toolkit for working with these sources. Neither Pakkala nor I believe that historical criticism provides the only interpretive lens for the study of biblical literature, and neither of us is driven by theological motivations. However, I can safely say that both of us think that historians of the southern Levant who dismiss the potential of biblical sources to contribute data that are relevant to historical inquiry can only produce a fragmentary picture of the southern Levant in the first millennium BCE. Pakkala and I also agree that archaeologists and Semitists who invoke biblical sources as evidence are liable to err in their conclusions when they are not aware of the literary history of a particular source.

It is not a matter of prioritizing historical criticism as the primary method for the interpretation of biblical texts but rather as the toolbox for historical inquiry in general. Other -isms are valuable for doing other things, such as learning about the ideological basis of contemporary racism, colonialism, xenophobia, rape culture, and patriarchal social structures. But whether one is a historian of the ancient Near East, of classical Greece and Rome, Renaissance Italy, or the modern period, one must begin by asking the same questions of the sources. Is the source a unity or a compilation? Are there signs that it has been reworked by other hands during its transmission? What can be known about its author—when and where did she or he live, and what was the social setting or status? How did the authors know what they relate—from other sources, or from personal experience, or are they drawing upon imagination? What is the purpose of the source? To be sure, the answers to these questions are conjectural when put to biblical sources, but they are no less conjectural when put to ancient Near Eastern, Greek, Roman, or medieval sources.

2.3.2. Juha Pakkala

The discussion has shown that historical critics need to justify the method's relevance for the twenty-first century and define more clearly what they are and what they are not doing. The limits and possibilities of the method should be explored and acknowledged. This might remove some concerns raised by the method's critics and skeptics. However, the discussion here did not provide any new arguments or considerations that would fundamentally undermine the method. The criticism remained general, and a possible future path for discussion would be to consider

concrete examples of Hebrew Bible passages: What are the consequences of practicing and not practicing the method? Analogies from other cultures and texts may be relevant to some extent, but they cannot be put before evidence from the Hebrew Bible itself. I have argued that scribal processes in the Hebrew Bible had special characteristics, and therefore analogies from other texts should only be used with caution. Other fields, such as Greco-Roman or medieval studies, provide possible questions and approaches that biblical studies may consider, but it is hard to see why they should be viewed as exclusive alternatives to literary criticism. The study of manuscripts, aesthetic values of texts, and reception histories of biblical texts are legitimate, but they are different research areas that answer other questions (see Edenburg's closing statement). It is a matter of research context whether and to what extent historical questions related to early Israel are relevant. Paradoxically, both Silverman and Borchardt call for literary critics to include or acknowledge other methods and approaches, but they factually imply that literary criticism has no place in biblical studies. Future discussions should begin from an honest interest in determining whether the method can provide significant information about early Judaism that is unattainable by other methods.

2.3.3. Francis Borchardt

Throughout the statements in this discussion, Edenburg and Pakkala have attempted to classify those critical of historical-critical methods as being thoroughly against the project of writing a history of ancient Israel and early Judaism altogether. They pound a drum signaling that those who reject the utility of the method want to focus on unhistorical or even ahistorical questions. For her part, Edenburg wrongly claims that I am calling for a return to the New Criticism. Pakkala suggests that using any other method amounts to historical nihilism. These positions could not be further from the truth. Rather, Edenburg and Pakkala's criticism suggests a dearth of historical literacy and a too-narrow conception of what counts as history.

History is not only, and perhaps not at all, a mere catalogue of people and places or a progression of events in the past that can be reconstituted from material, literary, and documentary sources. That modernist model of history is now largely dead. Rather, contemporary historians regard history as the narrative of the past that gets told and retold by agents of various sorts, whether scholars, institutions, monuments, lay people,

works of literature, or performances of ritual. These agents may concern themselves with only narrating past events and persons they believe to have existed (as tends to be the claim in modernity). Or they may entirely reject the need to confirm whether events actually occurred when they narrate them (as seems to be the case in the stories of the Hebrew Bible from the primeval tales up until at least the stories of Saul and David in the so-called Enneateuch). The most prevalent approach to the production of history appears to be something in between. In this range of models, historians betray a concern for telling stories about figures whom they believe to have lived but narrate stories about them performing fictional acts (as is the case with the books of Kings and Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible). Alternatively, these historians may be concerned with narrating stories of fictional figures who participate in events or achieve results that can be verified (as is the case with [at least portions of] the book of Jeremiah or 2 Maccabees). But whatever the model of historiography employed, history is still produced. As such, history is not dissimilar to fiction. It is primarily a type of storytelling and can be studied and analyzed as one would other types of narrative with more or less fictional aspects. This means that scholars of a historical era can focus their research on people as characters, events as plot points, and narratives as literary arcs betraying distinct perspectives without sacrificing their study of history. They need not concern themselves with determining the relative age of parts of the text as historical critics do. The historical-critical process may provide many interesting results, but it should not be considered necessary for the production of history.

The contemporary approach to the analysis of historical sources, and indeed to the continued writing of history, is not unhistorical or ahistorical. Instead, what has been dubbed the New Historicism focuses on the ongoing production of history (in all its forms) as a contested story about the past. Therefore, this perspective holds that history writing can be criticized as much for its values and effects as for whether and how well it represents past people, places, and events. The nineteenth-century foundations of the historical-critical project claim to focus largely on history and historical accounts as they actually happened. But in this vein historical criticism misrepresents history as something firmly fixed in the world, objective, lying somewhere beneath the surface and only needing to be discovered. This leads to an incomplete picture of history, more reflective of the modernist mindset than of the past “as it was.” If the historical-critical project were to more fully embrace the idea of history as a narrative

about the past, it would have much to contribute to the conversation by identifying the competing and complementary voices involved in telling that history.

2.3.4. Jason M. Silverman

We all agree that texts now in the Tanak/Hebrew Bible were edited and changed over time. Where we differ is whether the tools traditionally used by historical criticism are able to parse those changes. I share the concern of Pakkala and Edenburg in assessing biblical texts as historical texts. Borchardt and I do not find that the tools typically called historical critical are up to that task.

Neither Borchardt nor I have attempted to propose a full-scale replacement for the historical-critical method as was noted by our interlocutors. A replacement method, however, entirely depends on the purposes of the researcher. I think the goal of a comprehensive and detailed reconstruction of literary accretions through time is impossible with the data at hand, wherefore I cannot offer a replacement for that goal. However, historical investigation can still make careful analysis of the texts—it is one piece of evidence among others. The uncertainty in dating, however, means conclusions will often tend toward the minimal end of the scale. It also means that broad historical theories should not be built off the edifice of a single word (or passage or presumed author/editor/redactor). This is often frustrating and draining, but such is the nature of the evidence at hand. Archaeology, archives, the social sciences, and other literatures provide the comparative material for historiographical work. In Pakkala's earlier model, this sort of approach will sometimes appear as historical nihilism and sometimes as reception, depending on the inquiry in view and the assessment of the sources. Careful and cumulative case-building for history should use all sorts of evidence, not just from a single text corpus. The historian's assumptions in making decisions on that evidence (and what constitutes evidence) should themselves be repeatedly interrogated.

Though the texts that ended up in the Hebrew canon were repeatedly copied through time, and thus prove challenging, this is not a unique problem in human history; scholars of Zoroastrianism and Hinduism are well aware of the problems of long transmission histories. The classics, too, come down to us only through a long chain of transmission. I see no reason why—outside a confessional-theological frame or a disciplinary straitjacket—the methods and considerations of other historical and

sociological fields and literatures should not also apply to the Hebrew text. Perhaps the impact of the field would increase within the humanities were it to take the opportunity to showcase a reflexive historiography of the Hebrew Bible.

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3

Rethinking Textual Criticism and Its Relation to Literary Criticism

Anneli Aejmelaeus and Juha Pakkala

3.1. Anneli Aejmelaeus: Initial Statement

3.1.1. Introduction

The Qumran discoveries have changed the textual study of the Hebrew Bible in many ways. Above all, they have meant a tremendous increase in Hebrew text material that allows us to see the contours of the textual history more clearly. Indeed, they have revolutionized our understanding of the composition of the Hebrew Bible. As a consequence, the position of the Masoretic Text (MT) has been relativized and the Septuagint has been drawn from the margin to the center of textual studies. There is a (slowly) growing awareness among scholars of the changed textual basis of biblical studies, but the significance of this change in view of the methodology, especially the differentiation between the so-called lower and higher criticism, has not been fully realized. In my view, we are, in fact, experiencing a paradigm shift in biblical studies from which follows an urgent need for methodological rethinking. In this opening statement, I am going to outline my own understanding of textual criticism and make a proposal for how to react to the paradigm shift.¹

1. I have demonstrated the need for change recently in the following articles: "What Happened to the Text in Jer 25:1-7?," *TC* 22 (2017): 1-10; "Was Samuel Meant to Be a Nazirite? The First Chapter of Samuel and the Paradigm Shift in Textual Study of the Hebrew Bible," *Textus* 28 (2019): 1-20; and "Re-linking Prophecy and Fulfilment in 1 Samuel 3 and 4," in *Fortgeschriebenes Gotteswort: Studien zu Geschichte*,

3.1.2. Looking for a Definition of Textual Criticism

Early on, when I first became enthused about textual criticism, I tried to learn about its methodology from literature. When defining textual criticism, method books tend to repeat the explanation that textual criticism is as much an art as it is a science. You find this in practically every presentation of the text-critical method.² What does it mean that textual criticism is not just scientific research but at least as much an art? Does the expert want to say that a special talent is needed: textual criticism is not something just anybody could start doing? Or does it mean that intuition plays a substantial part in textual criticism? Emanuel Tov—a great name among contemporary textual critics—is one of those who compare textual criticism to art, and he frequently also emphasizes that text-critical decisions are subjective.³ By subjectivity he seems to refer precisely to that artistic or intuitive aspect. However, I find the use of the word *subjective* in this context totally out of place: textual criticism is not more subjective than any other kind of exegetical study or humanities in general (“arts” in that sense). All qualitative study in humanities needs to be conscious of the dangers of subjectivity, but saying that text-critical decisions are from the outset subjective suggests that it does not matter what the result is. Intuition may play a part in the practice of textual criticism, but it is not artistic intuition. It is the kind of intuition that

Theologie und Auslegung des Alten Testaments; FS für Christoph Levin zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Reinhard Müller, Urmas Nömmik, and Juha Pakkala (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 137–51.

2. It is clearly spelled out in A. E. Housman’s classic article “The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism,” *PCA* 18 (1921): 67–84: “Textual criticism is a science, and, since it comprises recension and emendation, it is also an art. It is the science of discovering error in texts and the art of removing it” (68). Although classical historical-critical methodology agrees with Housman that textual criticism deals with scribal errors, I doubt that the reference to science and art is made in the same sense by more recent writers (see below, footnote 3).

3. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 280–81. According to Tov, “to a large extent textual evaluation cannot be bound by any fixed rules. It is an art in the full sense of the word, a faculty that can be developed, guided by intuition based on wide experience. It is the art of defining the problems and finding arguments for and against the originality of readings (280).... Within this subjective evaluation, there is room for more than one view” (281).

helps one to see the connections between the various pieces of evidence available.⁴

Needless to say, I could not find a proper description of the methodology of textual criticism in literature. All we have are a few rules—like the rule of *lectio difficilior* and *lectio brevior*—which do not facilitate the work of a textual critic but rather explain common types of textual changes that either simplify the text or add details to it. Trying to proceed on the basis of such rules—giving priority to the more difficult or the shorter text—may lead to the correct result in a great many cases, but what about the rest? A more difficult reading has often been produced by an error, and texts may have been shortened by deliberate or accidental omission. The decision when to follow the rules and, in particular, to judge which alternative reading is more difficult is really subjective. Following the mentioned rules does unavoidably lead to subjectivity.⁵ The only rule that can be expected to give reliable results is the one that focuses on the change: “The reading that best explains the emergence of the alternative readings should be regarded as the most original.” Consequently, the task of textual criticism is really not to choose whichever reading seems best,⁶ but rather to reconstruct what happened, how the text was changed, and what the probable causes were for the change.⁷

3.1.3. The Evidential Paradigm

When I struggled with these questions, especially with the question of what kind of research textual criticism actually is—what is its methodology?—I came across an article written by Carlo Ginzburg, a

4. Ronald Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, TCS 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 127–47, offers a refreshing discussion of text-critical methodology and in particular Tov’s presentation of it.

5. See the interesting comment by Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 281: “In modern times, scholars are often reluctant to admit the subjective nature of textual evaluation, and, as a consequence, an attempt is often made, consciously or unconsciously, to create an artificial level of objectivity by the frequent application of abstract rules.”

6. For instance, Tov (*Textual Criticism*, 281) sees the task of textual criticism in “the choice of the most contextually appropriate reading.”

7. See also my “Corruption or Correction? Textual Development in the MT of 1 Samuel 1,” in *Textual Criticism and Dead Sea Scrolls Studies in Honour of Julio Trebolle Barrera: Florilegium Complutense*, ed. Pablo A. Torijano Morales and Andrés Piquer Otero, JSJSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–17.

micro-historian interested in intensive historical investigation of small objects, such as single events, less well-known individuals, reception of ideas, and the like. I had the opportunity to meet Ginzburg in Helsinki in 2003, when he gave a guest lecture at the Collegium for Advanced Studies, and soon after that I happened to find his article “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm.” Reading this article was like a revelation to me and helped me rethink my methodology.⁸

In his article, Ginzburg makes “an attempt ... to show the silent emergence of an epistemological model (or paradigm)” that has been “very much operative” in humanities but has “never become an explicit theory.”⁹ Ginzburg gives this epistemological model the name “evidential paradigm” or “conjectural paradigm,” by which he refers to the kind of inquiry based on evidence that consists of a great number of details from which the researcher attempts to infer what happened—“inferring the causes from their effects.”¹⁰

As a micro-historian, Ginzburg traces the emergence of this paradigm in the nineteenth century and shows in a most interesting and entertaining manner how such phenomena as the psychoanalysis introduced by Sigmund Freud and the detective figure Sherlock Holmes created by Arthur Conan Doyle were connected to and even dependent on a theory by an Italian art historian Giovanni Morelli, a theory for how to distinguish between an original masterpiece of art and a forgery.¹¹ According to Morelli’s theory, you cannot tell the forgery from the original by looking at the general impression or overall artistic style of the painting, but you need to look into the seemingly insignificant details, the representation of fingers and nails and ears and the like. This is where the original master shows his authentic hand, his real character as a painter, and this cannot be imitated or counterfeited.

Ginzburg shows how the three mentioned authors were connected to each other. All of them—Morelli, Freud, and Conan Doyle—were medical doctors and already had an inclination toward this kind of inquiry due to their profession. A medical diagnosis is—according to Ginzburg—noth-

8. Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–125.

9. Ginzburg, “Clues,” 96.

10. Ginzburg, “Clues,” 117.

11. Ginzburg, “Clues,” 97–102.

ing but an example of the evidential paradigm: interpreting the symptoms of a patient, inferring from them the kind of disease or disorder that the patient is suffering from, and giving a prognosis of the future course of the disease. Furthermore, Freud even mentioned Morelli's theory in one of his early writings.¹² Before having anything to do with psychoanalysis, he had been intrigued by "the method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data," details usually considered of little importance, which, however, "provided the key" for approaching what is secret and concealed. Freud found Morelli's method "closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis." In the case of Conan Doyle—or Sherlock Holmes—Ginzburg shows the connection to Morelli's theory precisely by interpreting hints and clues in some of the detective stories, which make Conan Doyle's familiarity with Morelli's writings quite evident. Ginzburg emphasizes that it is especially in the 1870s that the emergence of the evidential paradigm in humanities can be observed.¹³

What concerns Ginzburg most of all is evidently his own micro-historical methodology. He mentions as his motivation for writing about the evidential paradigm that he wishes to get rid of the fruitless opposition between "rationalism" and "irrationalism," which sounds a bit enigmatic. By irrationalism he seems to refer to what we might call *subjectivity* or *pure speculation*. I can imagine that micro-history—writing, for instance, about the lives of ordinary people in distant times or the reception history of single ideas—often means finding out about things that have not been documented properly and working like a detective, interpreting hints and clues and inferring the causes from their effects. A great deal of our work in biblical studies and related fields is of that very same kind, for instance, interpreting texts not just to clarify their contents but to interpret what they do not say, to find out about their background, and to form a picture of the social reality behind the text. It is easy to label this kind of study speculative or subjective, mere guesswork or nonscientific. Ginzburg's message is that the paradigm of interpreting signs and clues is not irrational or speculative or nonscientific. He hesitates to use the word *intuition*,

12. Ginzburg, "Clues," 99–101; Sigmund Freud, "Der Moses des Michelangelo," *Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* 3 (1914): 15–36 (esp. 23–24) [originally anonymous].

13. Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition*, 132, suggests that there is also a connection to Julius Wellhausen's *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871).

which, of course, may suggest irrationality, but he admits that in some sense intuition may play a part, though it is a lower type of intuition, helping to see the full picture behind the scattered clues.

3.1.4. Applying the Evidential Paradigm to Textual Studies

Textual criticism is also mentioned by Ginzburg as a field of study in which the evidential paradigm is being applied.¹⁴ That is, textual criticism *is*, in fact, related to the work of a detective—the work of Sherlock Holmes.¹⁵ What used to be a joke has become a serious matter.¹⁶ After reading Ginzburg, I realized that all my research was actually interpretation of hints and clues and could be understood as application of the evidential paradigm. (1) Not only textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, but (2) also research on the linguistic usage and translation techniques of the Septuagint translators—including conclusions from the linguistic data about the character of the various translators, their competence and lack of competence, their knowledge of Hebrew and the circumstances of the translation—turned out to exemplify the same paradigm. I had even used the metaphor of fingerprints when discussing the characteristics of the translators. (3) Moreover, the same is also true of the study of the textual history of the Septuagint; recognizing the various recensions of the Greek text by the kinds of (linguistic) changes they introduce into the Old Greek text also requires application of the evidential paradigm.

14. For Ginzburg (“Clues,” 107), textual criticism is, however, something different from what this article is about. I started applying the evidential paradigm to biblical textual criticism first in my “License to Kill? Deut 13:10 and the Prerequisites of Textual Criticism,” in *Verbum et Calamus: Semitic and Related Studies in Honour of the Sixtieth Birthday of Professor Tapani Harviainen*, ed. Hannu Juusola, Juha Laulainen, and Heikki Palva, StOr 99 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2004), 1–22, in that I placed the focus of textual criticism on the change (“What happened to the text?”) rather than the choice between readings, and discussed it more explicitly in “Corruption or Correction?” See Ronald Hendel’s discussion of the evidential paradigm (*Steps to a New Edition*, 131), which obviously depends on the latter article.

15. This is confirmed by the title of the Festschrift that was presented to me: *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes: Studies in the Biblical Text in Honour of Anneli Aejmelaesus*, ed. Kristin De Troyer, T. Michael Law, and Marketta Liljeström, CBET 72 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014).

16. My supervisor, Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen, used to joke that reading good research is like reading a detective novel.

What came as a relief to me was to learn that this kind of interpretation of the evidence is legitimate scientific research.¹⁷ Perhaps even more important was to learn that for this kind of inquiry no step-by-step methodology can be described.¹⁸ No wonder, then, that you cannot find such a description in the method books. Like Sherlock Holmes, the textual critic collects evidence—all the possible hints and clues, all the insignificant-looking details, all the factors that could have influenced the change that has happened in the text—and then draws conclusions concerning what happened to the text, in which direction the text was changed, whether it was changed by accident or on purpose, what the motive behind the change might have been, and so on. The best instruction for this kind of work is what I once heard from John William Wevers: “You’ve got to do your homework!” You need to do a great deal of background research concerning the languages in question, the history of the period and the milieu behind the text, the cultic usage, domestic life, and theological notions of the time, and more. You need to do further inquiries for each and every case you deal with—just like Sherlock Holmes or any of those figures we watch on television.

In textual criticism, you always deal with individual cases that you cannot solve with the help of statistics. However, it helps a great deal the more you know about the linguistic usage, about parallel cases, about the textual history, and about the realia behind the text. When you advance in your inquiry, you begin to see patterns of change, and they will help you out in the most difficult cases when you need to decide in which direction the change has happened. If you have two alternative readings *a* and *b*, the primary criterion for the decision between the two is the probability of what happened. The change from *a* to *b*, if *a* should be more ancient, and the change from *b* to *a*, if *b* should be more ancient, are often two

17. However, according to Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition*, 133, “neither art nor science”—referring to natural sciences.

18. Ginzburg, “Clues,” 124–25. See Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 281: “Common sense, rather than textual theories, is the main guide, although abstract rules are sometimes also helpful.” See also Housman, “Application of Thought,” 68: Textual criticism is “purely a matter of reason and of common sense ... not susceptible of hard-and-fast rules.” Furthermore, “you can have hard-and-fast rules if you like, but then you will have false rules, and they will lead you wrong; because their simplicity will render them inapplicable to problems which are not simple but complicated by the play of personality.” For criticism of these views, see Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition*, 128–29.

completely different stories.¹⁹ The actual decision to be made concerns these two stories, which one of the explanations more probably represents what really happened. The more you have learned about the patterns of change in your material, the easier it will be to judge between the alternative explanations of what happened.

3.1.5. The Problem with Lower and Higher Criticism

So far, I have been discussing textual criticism, but practically everything I have said also applies to literary criticism, which is also interested in what happened to the text. I mean that branch of historical-critical exegesis called *Literarkritik* in German, nowadays often called *source criticism* in the English-speaking world.²⁰ It used to be common to speak of lower and higher criticism, and the borderline between the two was drawn precisely between textual criticism and literary criticism. Descriptions of the historical-critical method speak of a clear division of labor between the two. You can still read in method books that textual criticism and literary criticism are to be kept strictly apart: literary criticism deals with the composition history of the text looking for repetitions, seams, contradictions, anything disturbing within the text from which conclusions can be drawn concerning the sources or redactional layers or comments by the editors, whereas textual criticism is restricted to what happened after that, during the copying process of the text.²¹

19. A more detailed description of this approach is found in my “Corruption or Correction?” 1–4. The alternative explanations are seldom symmetric but often involve literary-critical explanations and contrast them with traditional text-critical patterns (for instance, of two alternative readings the shorter one could have come about either through a scribal parablepsis or an editorial omission, whereas the longer one could depend on editorial complementation or on scribal dittography or harmonization).

20. On the different uses of the designation *literary criticism*, see John Barton, “Reflections on Literary Criticism,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 523–40.

21. Even Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*, ix, xi, had difficulty defining the borderline between the two approaches but thought that he protested “mit Recht gegen eine grundsätzliche Vermischung der Aufgaben.” See Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 2 and 269: “In our view, (groups of) readings that were produced at the literary growth stage of the biblical books (literary or editorial variants) should not be

The classical historical-critical methodology, like all methodology, builds on a theory concerning the reality to be studied—in our case, the reality behind the evidence available to us. Literary criticism builds on the hypothesis that the biblical books, at least most of them, were the product of editorial work by generations of scribes, who combined different sources and added their editorial comments, actualized and interpreted older texts, and so on. On the other hand, the division of labor between textual criticism and literary criticism builds on the hypothesis that the editorial work on the various books came to an end, the books were finished at a certain point, and what followed was the copying history during which errors were made by the copyists. The copying history was understood to be the playground of textual criticism, and according to this concept, its goal was to clear the text of scribal errors, to restore the text as it was at the end of the editorial process.

However, with the Qumran discoveries, it has become evident that this picture of the reality behind the biblical texts is no longer sustainable. Hardly anyone denies that the biblical texts were produced by generations of learned scribes and editors, but it has become impossible to fix the point when the editorial process had come to an end and the copying process started, that is, to draw the line between the different tasks of literary criticism and textual criticism. The very same textual evidence—texts from Qumran as well as from the Septuagint—that has given concrete confirmation of the editorial processes behind the final forms of the biblical books has in fact obliterated the traditional borderline between textual and literary criticism by showing that there is textual evidence—not just of scribal errors but—of editorial activity until the end of the Second Temple period.²² Scribal errors, on the other hand, are not always visible in the

subjected to textual evaluation, since they were not produced during the course of the transmission of texts” (2).

22. Evidence from Qumran manuscripts and from the Septuagint—textual evidence according to the old division of labor—has increasingly been used as evidence for the editorial processes in biblical books. See, for instance, Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, RBS 75 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), who express the aim of their endeavor as follows: “Besides demonstrating the importance of understanding the history and development of the texts, one of the main goals of this volume is to contribute to the refining of the exegetical methodology of literary and redaction criticism” (16). Textual criticism is mentioned in the conclusions: “The example texts show that the borderline between textual and literary criticism is difficult to draw to

textual evidence available to us either but certainly occurred during all phases of textual transmission. Thus, deliberate changing and editorial reworking of the text as well as accidental copying errors characterize the development of the biblical text all along.

We have already become accustomed to saying that there was no original text of the Hebrew Bible or its individual books,²³ meaning that the goal of textual criticism cannot be the exact wording of the complete text of a certain biblical book at a certain time.²⁴ However, this does not mean that textual criticism could be abandoned altogether. No, textual study only needs to concentrate on smaller sections of the text at a time. It is still highly relevant to evaluate the existing readings as to which one of them is the most ancient and to reconstruct as much as possible of the development of the text, whether accidental or deliberate. But what are the conclusions we should draw concerning the methodology? How should we organize and define the relation of what has so far been called textual criticism and literary criticism?

3.1.6. Rethinking the Historical-Critical Methodology

Textual critics of the Hebrew Bible—above all Emanuel Tov and Eugene Ulrich—have been talking for some time about an overlap between textual criticism and literary criticism in their discussions of cases in which there is evidence for different editions of the biblical books—the foremost example being Jeremiah, with a much shorter text in the Septuagint, and another one the story of David and Goliath in 1 Sam 17.²⁵ Ulrich

the extent that these methodologies have to be implemented hand in hand. Textual criticism is essential for understanding literary criticism” (225).

23. I would like to make a short remark about the situation in Septuagint studies. The notion of “no original text” has been so well received that some people have even drawn the conclusion that there is no original text of the Septuagint either. The origins of the Septuagint are, however, in the translation of the various books—it has a clear starting point—and the goal of textual criticism is the original text of the translation—or the best possible approach to it. This is what the critical editions of the Septuagint aim at. As for the use of the Septuagint in textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, it represents the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the original translation, that is, one random Hebrew manuscript of each translated book.

24. This underlines the problematic nature of a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible.

25. For instance, Tov, *Textual Criticism*, sees in the overlap between the textual and literary criticism “a worrying aspect of post-modern textual criticism” (326, see

has pioneered in drawing conclusions from this evidence on the overall picture of the emergence of the books of the Hebrew Bible. He speaks of “the developmental composition of the Bible,” underscoring the radical change in our understanding of the reality behind the biblical books. However, speaking of an overlap between textual criticism and literary criticism is hardly an adequate reaction to what is in fact a paradigm shift. In my view, more radical conclusions are needed in order to adjust our methodological thinking to the new situation.²⁶

Continued use of the traditional terminology—with or without reference to an overlap—leads to a situation where scholars use the terminology each in their own way, and it becomes impossible to understand what is meant. In spite of the overlap, a conservative textual critic would keep the old borderline and refuse to evaluate variants that represent editorial activity.²⁷ Another scholar with a more modern attitude equally continues using the old terminology but fills it with a different content, referring to textual criticism as long as dealing with concrete textual evidence and to literary criticism when there is no external textual evidence.²⁸ But what purpose does this new division of labor between the two methods serve? Is it at all correct to speak of two *methods* when both approaches seek to answer the same question—“what happened to the text?”—when in both cases the text to be studied reveals both deliberate editorial changes and scribal errors?

In their study *Evidence of Editing*, Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny conclude that textual criticism and literary criticism “have to be

also 283–85), whereas Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible*, VTSup 169 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 313, regards “that line between ‘higher criticism’ and ‘lower criticism’ as vanished” and sees “the literary process still at work and frequently overlapping with scribal variants typically treated as part of textual criticism.”

26. The problem has also been recognized by George Brooke, “The Qumran Scrolls and the Demise of the Distinction between Higher and Lower Criticism,” in *Reading the Dead Sea Scrolls: Essays in Method*, EJL 39 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 1–17.

27. See Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 2, quoted above in footnote 21.

28. See Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 225: “Textual criticism is essential for understanding literary criticism.... The main difference between the methods is that textual criticism investigates those changes that were preserved in the variant editions, while literary criticism seeks to reconstruct the same processes without such empirical evidence.”

implemented hand in hand.”²⁹ Why not merge them altogether? The object to be studied—the composition and textual history of the Hebrew Bible—is the result of one complex continuum of editorial and scribal activities, partly documented in external evidence, partly to be reconstructed on the basis of the final result of the process. I do not see how the study of this continuum could be divided into two separate analytical phases based on different methodology.³⁰ The existing differences are in the textual material and in the various operations of the scribes and editors of the text, not in the methodological nature of this kind of inquiry, which has been discussed above. We are lucky as researchers to have material that gives us glimpses into the editorial history of the text, but these documented pieces of the editorial process are organically connected with the earlier editorial phases that are not so clearly visible. Evaluating or even recognizing signs of editorial measures in the textual evidence suffers from their detachment from the earlier editorial phases, as there may have been similar trends and motives behind the changes and the later editors may be dependent on the earlier ones.

I suggest that the two traditional methods, textual criticism and literary criticism, be combined to one methodology that deals with both deliberate and inadvertent changes of the text, whether documented in textual evidence or traceable only through contradictions or conspicuous details of the text. What to call this methodology is an open question. Although perhaps not advisable, it would, in fact, be fully adequate to call the new combined method “textual criticism.”³¹ For instance, in Septuagint studies textual criticism includes the study of the recensions, which contain deliberate stylistic and editorial changes of the text. The transition to new methodological thinking should, however, be made more clearly visible in the way we talk about it. Adding the attribute “new” to textual criticism—to accord with the model of “new literary criticism”—is hardly recommendable either.

29. See above, note 22.

30. Note that I am not discussing redaction criticism, which I understand as a synthetic phase following the analytical phase of textual study and building on it.

31. The opposite is suggested by Brooke, “Qumran Scrolls,” 15–16, who argues against keeping up the old hierarchy of lower and higher criticism and for integrating textual criticism “as an indispensable part” into “literary analysis” with the aim of “a holistic account of the evidence.”

The combination of the two traditional methods comprises critical and analytical research of the text of the Hebrew Bible. Its goal is to trace back the development of the text—what happened?—and to find out the reasons and motivations behind the change—why did it happen?—to support the argument. It can be described as a critical analysis of the text. Should we call it by that name: “the critical analysis of the text”? Or should we talk about “text-historical research”?³² Another alternative could be to combine the old names, for instance, “textual-literary criticism.”³³ Or “textual-literary analysis” to distinguish this phase from redaction criticism or any other synthetic approach that builds on the results of the textual-literary analysis.

Whatever name may be chosen, it is essential that we biblical scholars finally update our methodological language to accord with the paradigm shift that has long since been reality.

3.2. Juha Pakkala: First Response

Textual and literary criticism form the core of textual studies of the Hebrew Bible. Both investigate the scribal history of biblical texts and ask how the texts were changed. A distinction between these methods can be found in method books and introductions to biblical exegesis, and it is apparent in the self-identification of scholars either as textual or literary critics.³⁴ They commonly organize separate sessions in international conferences (e.g., Society of Biblical Literature, the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament) or even entirely separate meetings,³⁵ and scholarly journals may focus on one of the methods.³⁶ Wider biblical scholarship also recognizes the two methods as different. While textual criticism is

32. See Ville Mäkipelto, *Uncovering Ancient Editing: Documented Evidence of Changes in Joshua 24 and Related Texts*, BZAW 513 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 274–76.

33. This was, in fact, suggested by Kristin De Troyer at the Annual Meeting of Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions in Sannäs, 11 May 2019.

34. See, for example, Uwe Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments*, UTB 2664 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Vilho Riekkinen and Timo Veijola, *Johdatus eksegetiikkaan: Metodioppi*, PFES 37 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1983). Some method books focus on one of the methods only, e.g., Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

35. For example, the annual International Conference for Septuagint Studies held in Wuppertal.

36. E.g., *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* (<http://jbtc.org/>) and *Textus*.

widely accepted as a necessity for biblical studies, literary criticism is more contested and even rejected by many scholars.³⁷ Accordingly, many scientific biblical commentaries discuss the main text-critical problems, while a literary-critical discussion is often limited or even nonexistent. The difference in recognition has a theological background. Especially in earlier research, conservative scholars rejected literary criticism, or higher criticism, primarily on theological grounds, while lower criticism was generally accepted. Nonetheless, their isolation is detrimental to both methods, which have much to learn from each other.

The technical reason for having two separate methods relates to the evidence with which they work and with partially different goals. Textual critics investigate variant readings in preserved manuscripts and try to evaluate their relative age. Although there may be interest in secondary readings and their theological content,³⁸ the method conventionally seeks to evaluate variant readings in order to determine what the most original reading is. A number of specialized approaches and questions, such as translation techniques, daughter translations, or the nature of specific manuscripts or manuscript traditions, are regarded as subfields of textual criticism. Conventional literary criticism seeks to detect additions in cases where text-critical evidence is lacking. This is done by looking at text-internal signs or indicators, such as tensions, inconsistencies, repetitions, and syntactic mistakes. Although textual criticism also uses text-internal signs as clues or arguments, literary criticism primarily makes conclusions on their basis. In other words, both study the same textual processes, but textual criticism has a wider toolbox and more material to determine what happened to a text.

Both methods study intentional scribal changes as well as unintentional mistakes. Although there may be scholars who seek to separate intentional scribal changes or redactional activity from the copying process, this division is unsustainable, as Aejmelaesus points out. The distinction of the

37. For recent example of skepticism, see Robert Rezetko and Raymond F. Person, *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, AIL 25 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 1–35, and Benjamin Ziemer, *Kritik des Wachstumsmodells: Die Grenzen alttestamentlicher Redaktionsgeschichte im Lichte empirischer Evidenz*, VTSup 182 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

38. E.g., Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

methods cannot relate to the types of changes but only to the presence or nonpresence of textual evidence. There may be unintentional scribal mistakes or textual corruptions for which there is no textual evidence. For example, Mic 1–2 implies mistakes and/or textual corruptions, but only some of them are documented in text-critical evidence.³⁹ There may be textual evidence for intentional theological changes. For example, the MT of Jeremiah contains repeated intentional additions, which are lacking in the Septuagint, and it is widely acknowledged that the shorter version in the Septuagint goes back to a Hebrew *Vorlage* that generally represents an earlier version of the book. In other words, scholarly discussion concerning the relative age of the variants is part of textual criticism regardless of the content and intentionality of the variants. In this respect, both textual and literary criticism study the same scribal processes, which underscores the proximity of the methods.

Referring to Ginzburg's work and concept of the "evidential paradigm,"⁴⁰ Aejmelaesus highlights the importance of paying attention to all possible details that may give clues to solving a textual problem—this relates to both methods, textual and literary criticism. She compares it to the work of a detective who has to study a crime scene very carefully and pay attention to the smallest detail to determine what happened. This necessitates vast knowledge about the sociohistorical background

39. The corruptions, especially in the MT but also in the Septuagint of Micah, have been recognized early on in research. For example, John M. P. Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius A. Bewer write: "The text has come down to us in a bad state of corruption" (John M. P. Smith, William Hayes Ward, and Julius A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Joel* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911], 5). In many cases, the text-critical variants are attempts to improve corruptions in the text. Corruptions are found in nearly all verses of chapters 1–2 (see Smith, Ward, and Bewer, *Micah*, 31–32, 34–35, 42–44, etc.). For example, Mic 2:2 contains a number of text-critical variants between the MT and Septuagint, and it is probable that both contain changes (e.g., several transpositions are possible in the Septuagint). Variants can also be found in other witnesses, such as the Peshitta. Although especially prominent in the first two chapters, there are accidental mistakes in other parts of the book as well. Examples of accidental corruptions include: dittography 5:1; haplography 5:1, 4; metathesis 2:4; erroneous suffix: 2:9. Intentional changes are also frequent (e.g., 1:5). According to Smith, Ward, and Bewer (*Micah*, 5–6), the Septuagint text of Micah is largely superior to that of the MT.

40. Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–125.

of the texts. In a good murder mystery, the detective solves the case by paying attention to a small detail that can only be understood thanks to his/her vast background knowledge and having the wisdom to use it. What the detective has learned in detective school is a mere starting point that offers some rough guidelines, but it cannot replace all the other knowledge and wisdom needed to understand different crime scenes.⁴¹ In addition to the basic methodology of exegesis, a good textual scholar should be familiar with archaeology and its recent discoveries, manuscripts and their transmission, linguistic history, translation techniques, history of religions, and many other fields and topics. For example, it is challenging to make correct text-critical decisions on place names without a knowledge of toponymy, which necessitates know-how in archaeology, archaeological surveys, old Arabic place names in Palestine, and the development of place names through times and languages (from Hebrew, Aramaic, and/or Greek to Arabic). This is especially important for the text-critical study of books, such as Joshua, with numerous place names.⁴² Since no scholar can master all fields, she or he needs to consult the work of others with the ability to evaluate other scholars' theories.

Despite the complications associated with the interpretation of clues in the texts and the presence of many issues beyond one's expertise, textual critics often have a good chance to determine what happened in a text. Unlike literary critics, textual critics have to choose between alternatives, or textual variants. As in a murder mystery, one of the actors is guilty, and usually there are only two or three main suspects. Clearly, there are many textual problems where the case is not obvious because there are not enough clues. Unlike in most murder mysteries, in the real world there are criminals who did their homework and did not leave clues for the detective. Since textual scholars are pressed to determine what happened—for example, for a text-critical edition they are preparing—in some cases they have to choose between uncertain alternatives. Subjective interpretation of the data has more room in cases that are not clear.

41. For example, the principles *lectio difficilior potior* and *lectio brevior potior* are possible considerations that should never be implemented rigorously and without other considerations. One should primarily understand the text in question and its details before applying such guidelines as arguments.

42. See, for example, Erasmus Gaß, *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuches in historischer und redaktioneller Perspektive*, ADPV 35 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005).

Literary critics work with textual problems where a crucial piece of evidence, the manuscript evidence, is lacking. The evaluation relies on text-internal considerations, such as tensions, contradictions, use of unusual terminology, narrative inconsistencies, thematic digressions, repetitions, and syntactic or grammatical problems. In some cases, there is enough evidence to make a highly probable case that a textual segment was added (e.g., Ezra 7:7; 8:35–36), but some subjectivity is always involved when a text is regarded as inconsistent, contradictory, or repetitive. What is repetitive for one scholar may be a stylistic feature for another. Deep understanding of the text in question is imperative for evaluating what is a stylistic feature and what may be a repetition unlikely to derive from a single author. It may be challenging to present views that derive from one's own deep understanding of a text as clear arguments. This could be characterized as intuition that helps read the signs correctly. Literary-critical theories are particularly dependent on cumulative evidence stemming from a number of considerations that increase the probability of a theory. Nonetheless, because of the lack of manuscript evidence, literary-critical theories mostly fall short in certainty compared with those of textual criticism. Moreover, literary critics do not have a limited number of suspects to choose from. She or he starts with a text where even the suspects have to be found. The uncertainty involved in literary-critical theories correlates with the wider skepticism towards its results.⁴³ To push the detective analogy further, in most cases textual critics have a good chance of making a case that holds in court, while literary critics have this luxury in some cases only.⁴⁴ This does not mean that literary critics should not look at all the available evidence. Due to the lack of textual evidence, they may have to pay attention to the smallest detail even more carefully, if possible. Nonetheless, their results generally remain more hypothetical than those reached by textual critics.

The distinction of the methods has a pragmatic dimension as well. Textual criticism is historically associated with the need to establish a text for modern Bible translations, while literary-critical theories rarely

43. E.g., Rezetko and Person, *Empirical Models*, 1–36; and Benjamin Ziemer, *Kritik des Wachstumsmodells*, 3–24, 697–711.

44. This is not the place to discuss the rationale of literary criticism, but see Juha Pakkala, “Historical Criticism in Light of Documented Evidence: What Does Text-Critical and Other Documented Evidence Tell Us about the Early Transmission of the Hebrew Bible?” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 85 (2020): 22–46.

have direct bearing on texts used in religious communities. The immediate and perhaps the main audience of literary-critical theories is an academic public interested in historical questions concerning the emergence and development of the conceptions and social contexts of early Judaism and Christianity. It is hardly realistic to expect the hypothetical and reconstructed *Urdeuteronomium* or the Yahwistic source of the Pentateuch to be marked in Bible translations, but a determination of what should be regarded the oldest preserved version of the Pentateuch is needed for translations.⁴⁵

Another complication of a suggested merger of the methods is the natural and historical proximity of literary criticism with redaction criticism. The same scholars traditionally practice literary and redaction criticism. In principle, the latter builds on the former, but in practice a theory emerges in a process where both influence each other. When a scholar notices additions with a particular content or style in different parts of a text (for example, an emphasis on the law in Deuteronomy), this may hint that a section of the text has been added even when there are not enough text-internal arguments for it in the immediate context. A full merger of textual and literary criticism would also implicate redaction criticism. Source criticism, which should primarily refer to the study of sources behind literary works (e.g., pentateuchal sources) and not be equated with literary criticism, is a further subfield, which would have to be involved in any merger as well.

A merger of the methods would not eradicate the slightly different goals, different toolbox of argumentation, the need for textual criticism for translations, and divergent recognition in wider biblical scholarship. Scholars would still have to refer to different strands of the merged method. One should also consider the confusion that would result from the merger of two established methodologies (or four with redaction and source criticism) and the necessarily new label for the merged method, which in substance and coverage would be close to the historical-critical

45. Clearly, churches and especially synagogues continue to use the MT as the base text for modern Bible translations. Christian translations have begun to adopt Septuagint variants when they are clearly older than the MT, but the MT is still often the starting point. Despite the high probability that the Septuagint version of Jeremiah is generally older than the MT, the latter is nonetheless used as the base text. This is probably due to the substantial differences between the versions.

method.⁴⁶ Merging the two methods is a fine ideal, but its benefits should far outweigh the confusion it would cause in order to make it worthwhile. The main benefits can also be attained without a merger.

Most important is better communication of scholars specialized in the methods with each other. One needs to organize joint sessions, meetings, and workshops. Joint publications should be encouraged, and they should focus on areas where the methods can learn from each other. For example, familiarity with typically assumed late additions in literary- and redaction-critical models and their assumed development of conceptions give textual critics additional tools to evaluate between variants. Similarly, literary and redaction critics can benefit greatly from the observations of textual critics on how and what kind of textual segments were added. Redaction critics may learn about the possible relationships between different documented additions. For example, the MT pluses in Jeremiah that emphasize Babylon and the Babylonians may form a loosely connected layer. Do they correspond to typical redactional layers, or should redaction-criticism reevaluate its models based on such documented evidence? In an ideal case, scholars would be experts in both conventional methods. Future scholars should have training and deep understanding of both methods, their main challenges, conventional issues, and theories.⁴⁷ A shift toward seeing textual history as a whole and ideally by the same scholars is a development that should be encouraged, and it can only benefit the historical study of biblical texts.

3.3. Anneli Aejmelaeus: First Response

During recent years, I have enjoyed inspiring cooperation with Pakkala, cooperation that was initiated by him. I was invited to several symposia

46. Note that the term *historical criticism* primarily refers to what was called higher criticism. Historical criticism thus covers literary and redaction criticism and other methods connected with them. The German term *historisch-kritische Methode* usually includes textual criticism as well, while the English term historical criticism usually does not include it. There appears to be a common misunderstanding about the use of these terms, and this shows why one should not invent new terms. John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 1–3, prefers to call the method biblical criticism.

47. Some recent works by young scholars have shown that textual and literary criticism can be implemented in the same study on a high level, e.g., Timo Tekoniemi, *The Textual History of 2 Kings 17*, BZAW 536 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), and Mäkipelto, *Uncovering Ancient Editing*.

organized by him and was surprised by his interest in my textual studies and his use of material that I shared with him as examples by which he wished to demonstrate the different changes that had taken place in biblical texts.⁴⁸ Without this exchange, I would not be where I am in my rethinking of the methodology. I had the impression that we had come close to each other in methodological questions concerning the relationship between the so-called textual and literary criticism. I still think that there is a deep agreement between us as far as the actual work on texts is concerned; however, what remains to be discussed is mainly how to verbalize our methodologies.

In his contribution to our discussion, Pakkala emphasizes the differences he sees between textual criticism and literary criticism. Many of his statements on textual criticism do not, however, hold true unless we understand textual criticism in the traditional sense as the lower criticism that merely aims at removing scribal errors. In his argument, Pakkala takes a very conventional stand, although neither of us understands or practices textual criticism in the traditional sense. Pakkala claims that one of the advantages of textual criticism over literary criticism is that Bible translations take into account the results of textual criticism but not those of literary criticism. In reality, it is very haphazard whether even more recent Bible translations have restored on account of the Septuagint or Qumran manuscripts, for instance, small details of the text discovered to be omitted or changed in the MT. For instance, 1 Sam 1:9 “Hannah stood before the Lord” (a sentence preserved in the Septuagint, but lacking in the MT) is found in the Finnish Bible 1992, but not in the English Standard Version 2007, and neither of these translations has the counterpart in 1:14: “go out from the presence of the Lord” (which is found in the Septuagint); in 1:23, “may the Lord confirm *your* vow” (according to 4QSam^a and the Septuagint) is found in the Finnish Bible 1992, but the English Standard Version 2007 follows the MT: “may the Lord establish *his* word” (emphasis added).⁴⁹ As for the differences between shorter and longer versions in Jeremiah or in 1 Sam 17–18, I do not know of any Bible translation that would use brackets to mark the later parts in the text, although I think

48. For instance, Juha Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible*, FRLANT 251 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 201–6.

49. The examples are given in my own translation, except for the one from the ESV.

this could certainly be done.⁵⁰ In Pakkala's terminology, these more extensive textual differences do belong to the realm of textual criticism, but, of course, they no longer fit into the traditional category of textual criticism, as more is at stake here than just scribal errors.

Furthermore, according to Pakkala, results of textual criticism are more readily accepted by other scholars as well. This is not true if cases other than scribal slips are considered. To continue with the examples mentioned before, the discussion around the shorter and longer versions of the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17–18) has been going on for decades, and there is still no unanimity concerning the secondary nature of the longer version. It has been just as difficult to convince colleagues that the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint of Jeremiah was a more ancient version of the book than the MT.⁵¹ The authority of the MT, supported by the traditional understanding of textual criticism, is still strong and only slowly subsiding. The kinds of findings that my textual study on 1 Samuel leads me to and the resulting thesis that the MT has undergone a fairly late, ideologically motivated editorial retouch often seem to meet skepticism rather than approval by colleagues.⁵²

Pakkala connects the greater acceptability of textual criticism with the more hypothetical nature of literary criticism. As a matter of fact, the hypothetical nature or acceptability of results varies a great deal from case to case in both kinds of textual study. As I have tried to argue, textual criticism is not just about choosing the most suitable among existing alternative readings but rather reconstructing what happened to the text. Sometimes none of the existing readings as such deserves to be chosen as the most ancient or best wording of the text.⁵³ Reconstructing the development of the text through corruption and correction is at times just as hypothetical

50. As is well known, brackets have been used in editions and translations of the New Testament to show later additions to the text, for instance, Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11.

51. Dissenting views are found in prominent commentaries, for instance, Walter Dietrich, *Samuel: 1Sam 13–26*, BKAT 8.2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), esp. 322–25, and Georg Fischer, *Jeremia*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 1–25.

52. Consider, for instance, my “Was Samuel Meant to Be a Nazirite?” I have not received a single comment—either positive or negative—on it.

53. Consequently, a critical edition at times has to offer a reconstructed text for which the existing textual evidence is found in the apparatus and the argument possibly in the preface of the edition.

as any literary-critical solution, whereas some other literary-critical results may be totally obvious. It is but a difference in degree, not in kind.

As for the connection of literary criticism with redaction criticism, I do not see a decisive difference there either. As I understand it, our discussion concerns the *analytical* phase of textual study—whether to distinguish between two analytical methods⁵⁴—and does not challenge the general legitimacy of historical-critical research.⁵⁵ Redaction criticism is a *synthetic* phase that builds on the results of the analytical survey.⁵⁶ What kinds of conclusions can be drawn from the results of the analysis is totally dependent on the kind of text we are dealing with and on the kind of history behind the textual evidence we have. If a text has gone through a thorough redaction or editorial reworking or several of them, the results of the analysis will help uncover features of those. If, on the other hand, the text has been combined from different sources, the analysis will yield material that points in that direction. The different books of the Hebrew Bible have different composition histories. There are a few that might have been produced mainly by one writer at one time, having perhaps just intertextual connections with other texts, but all others reveal the work of several hands, either in the form of combining source texts or of different, more or less thorough editorial reworkings over a longer period of time.⁵⁷

Thus, it is not always redaction that will be the outcome of a critical analysis of the biblical text. There are different *phenomena of systematic*

54. As pointed out by John Barton, “Reflections on Literary Criticism,” 537, it is questionable whether “source criticism” (meaning “literary criticism”) deserves the name *method* at all, as it does not involve a methodological procedure, being rather based on the observation of texts. Martti Nissinen, “Reflections on the Historical-Critical Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism,” in LeMon and Richards, *Method Matters*, 479–504, suggests that “hypothesis, approach, or orientation” would be better designations than “method” for what historical criticism in biblical studies represents. The procedure meant by *method* here is hardly anything else but close reading and keen observation of the text.

55. Such challenges are discussed by John Barton, “Reflections on Literary Criticism,” and Martti Nissinen, “Reflections on the Historical-Critical Method.”

56. Riekkinen and Veijola, *Johdatus eksegetiikkaan*, 212.

57. It should not be forgotten that the nature of textual study in the case of the Hebrew Bible is very different from textual criticism in most other cases of ancient literature in which the task of textual criticism is really to remove scribal errors and, at the most, slight retouches. The difference lies precisely in the eventful textual and composition history of the Hebrew Bible.

change in the biblical texts.⁵⁸ As soon as the analytical survey reveals details that allow the identification of a phenomenon of systematic change—be it called redaction, editorial rework, or revision—the kind of proximity or interplay between the analytical and the synthetic phases that Pakkala observes between literary and redaction criticism comes into effect. The identification of an editorial layer that consists of certain kinds of textual changes, and possibly even reveals a motivation behind them, will help find more details belonging to the same editorial layer. My text-critical analysis of the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel or of the Septuagint of the same book and the conclusions I draw on the editorial retouching of the Hebrew text or on the various revisions of the Greek text exemplify the same pattern of interplay between the analytical and the synthetic phases of research. Pakkala's textual analysis on the historical books and his redaction-critical conclusions based on that analysis are not principally different. In all these cases, previous advances from the analytical phase to the synthetic theory-building help interpret further findings in other parts of the text. Thus, there is a clear analogy between the various subfields of textual study.

How about the tools, then? I do not see decisive differences between them either. Resorting again to the metaphor of a detective, one could compare the different phenomena of change in the biblical texts with various crimes investigated by detectives. In both cases, there are traces left by human agents that need to be discovered and investigated in order to solve the problem. The toolbox of the investigator is the same for different cases—the detective and the biblical scholar have their typical toolboxes—but the individual tools to be used must be chosen according to each particular case. The problem solving, “inferring the causes from their effects,” consideration of motives and the argumentation for the solution follow the same principles whatever the crime, as they do in different subfields of textual research. The differences that remain depend most of all on the choice of research area and what it has to offer, as well as on the personality of the researcher—more so than on differences in method.

What is most important to me in this discussion is that—whatever our line of inquiry—we should proceed by the terms of the text and not by the terms of conventional ideas about the methods, no matter how widely they are accepted among biblical scholars. The text must always be our

58. By *systematic change*, I mean repeated changes according to some discernible principle or motivation, sometimes partial and superficial, sometimes more intensive and thorough.

prime concern. I appreciate that we have basic agreement on the complex continuity of textual processes in the composition and textual history of the biblical texts. I understand that Pakkala also admits that isolation between textual and literary criticism is detrimental to both. This is what we have learned from the texts, mainly from the Qumran discoveries and from the Septuagint. The texts do not show any borderlines between cases to be handled by different methods. On the contrary, the textual scholar often stands in front of alternative solutions that, according to conventional thinking, belong to different areas, for instance, in cases in which the main textual witnesses—the MT and the Septuagint—differ in length of text: Does the longer text stem from editorial addition or the shorter one from scribal error? Or is it a question of deliberate omission for ideological reasons? What looks like a textual difference often turns out to be an editorial change. And changes revealed by concrete textual evidence may be closely connected to other cases where such evidence does not exist (e.g., in 1 Sam 17:12–31, the story of David’s arrival on the battlefield is closely connected with David’s anointing by Samuel in 1 Sam 16:1–13).⁵⁹ Thus, distinguishing between two methods of textual analysis and drawing any logical borderline between them has become practically impossible.

The consequences of this understanding for the methodology are radical enough to allow the designation of a paradigm shift. Paradigm shifts *per definitionem* change established beliefs and practices. They are seldom convenient. Most of us have grown up with the conventional methods and need to change our terminology and our way of speech in some respect. We have come to a point where we cannot and should not rely on the conventional method books but need to give a new name to our methodology in order to pass on what we have learned to the following generations.

3.4. Juha Pakkala: Second Response

There is no question that collaboration with Aejmelaesus and her CSTT team 2 has been very fruitful for CSTT team 3 and for me personally. For someone with a primary background in literary and redaction criticism, textual criticism and text-critical evidence for scribal processes in the

59. See my “Rewriting David and Goliath?,” in *From Scribal Error to Rewriting: How Ancient Texts Could and Could Not Be Changed*, ed. Anneli Aejmelaesus, Drew Longacre, and Natia Mirotdadze, DSI 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 165–80.

Hebrew Bible have been crucial for reevaluating the methodological basis of literary criticism. Transmission processes and scribal changes observed in documented textual evidence should have high priority for understanding the undocumented earlier transmission of the text.

It is important that we, as biblical scholars interested in the history of the texts, essentially agree on the actual work that should be done and on the processes of textual transmission. This may be the most significant result of our collaboration and this discussion, since agreement on these questions is far from self-evident in current biblical studies. Whatever differences in opinion remain, they are dwarfed by much more fundamental differences among biblical scholars on textual history and its significance. Some scholars question whether textual history can and should be investigated at all.⁶⁰ Others contend that the conventional study of texts is based on false assumptions about how the texts evolved and were transmitted.⁶¹ These are fundamental questions for the future of biblical studies. What we have here is a friendly dialogue about terminology. As noted by Aejmelaes, “what remains to be discussed is mainly how to verbalize our methodologies.”

If we were at an early stage of historical-critical studies, different terminology would probably be more suitable. At least the study of the texts should not be divided too strictly between those who study manuscript variants and those who study scribal changes without manuscripts. To call them two different methodologies would be misleading. Nonetheless, some terminology would be needed to refer to the two stages or processes in the study of textual history, but it is unfruitful to speculate further about potential past histories. At this stage, when practically all biblical scholars roughly know what the presently used terms refer to, I would hesitate to confuse scholarship with new terms and to begin an uphill journey to establish them. That new terms are particularly difficult to establish is underscored by the term *historical criticism*, which is understood in different ways even today.⁶²

Many scholars certainly associate accidental scribal mistakes with textual criticism and intentional revisions with literary criticism, but I

60. See especially the contributions of Francis Borchardt and Jason Silverman in “Historical Criticism: Essential or Expendable?” in this volume.

61. E.g., Rezetko and Person, *Empirical Models*, 1–35; and Ziemer, *Kritik des Wachstumsmodell*.

62. The term *historical criticism* variably includes textual criticism.

do not share this view. Reiterating my initial position, textual and literary criticism both study unintentional *and* intentional changes. Both copying mistakes and scribal changes took place during the entire transmission history of the Hebrew Bible until its texts were frozen for intentional changes sometime around the turn of the era.

Textual criticism does not have a particular *advantage* over literary criticism in providing material for translations, but the difference with respect to translations is still obvious. One can only agree with Aejmelaesus that translations should take into consideration the results of textual criticism more consistently. For example, it would be logical to prioritize the Septuagint variants in Samuel over the MT variants when the latter are clearly secondary. But one can also understand the resistance of faith communities to adopting a very different version of Jeremiah or Ezekiel, for example. Of course, this problem is more acute for those faith communities that do not regard a certain version as holy and authoritative but try to reach the oldest version preserved in different witnesses.⁶³ If priority were consistently given to the oldest text-critical variant, some texts used in daily liturgy might disappear entirely from Bible translations. There are limits to what a tradition can accommodate, even if it might be consistent and logical. I do not wish to defend any practice, merely to state what I consider the factual situation and practical limits.

Aejmelaesus rightly notes that not all scholars accept text-critical theories. Passages that are considered central in theological regard are obviously a problem. There are some scholars who neglect or reject even obvious cases,⁶⁴ but it is hardly possible to deny that textual criticism enjoys a wider recognition among biblical scholars than literary criticism. The reason for this is the *generally* more hypothetical nature of literary-critical theories in comparison to text-critical ones, which obviously does not mean that this is always the case. It needs to be stressed that the differing recognition of the methods is not a methodological difference between textual and literary criticism.

63. The MT is obviously the text for Jewish communities, while Christian communities have vacillated between different versions, favoring the MT, Septuagint, or the Vulgate (and in the English-speaking world even the King James Version). It is only in the past century that text-critical variants assumed to be most original by text critics have been adopted as the basis for translations. This is especially apparent in the New Testament, while in the Old Testament the issue is more complicated.

64. See footnote 51.

Idealism and the pursuit of improvement are certainly necessary in science, but practical considerations should also play a role. Ideally, each biblical scholar has a full toolbox and knows how to use all the tools. They should not only include all information directly relevant for textual study, but also all information from related fields, such as archaeology, Assyriology, sociology, and more. However, it is not possible to master all fields at a high level. In early historical-critical research, in the nineteenth century, the same scholars were often textual and literary critics, and they would also be familiar with practically all relevant sources and main studies concerning the ancient Near East. Julius Wellhausen is a prime example of a scholar who practiced both textual and literary-critical studies.⁶⁵ As knowledge of manuscripts grew, new manuscripts were found, and research publications became more numerous, it was increasingly challenging to master everything. Biblical studies have expanded to include a growing number of subfields. Scholars necessarily become experts in a rather narrow field: they may focus on textual criticism or literary criticism, but only in exceptional cases are they fully conversant in both. This may also be the reason why Aejmelaeus herself rarely reconstructs the earlier literary histories of texts for which no textual variants are preserved. Nonetheless, there is hope that the next generation of scholars will master both fields. At least this development is certainly to be encouraged, and if it takes place, the professional self-identification of these scholars will be crucial. Perhaps they will not identify themselves with one of the methods, which would certainly bring about a natural change in scholarship.

Consequently, I greatly sympathize with Aejmelaeus's proposal and aspiration to bring scholars working with the same processes together. We clearly agree on how the texts should be investigated, and this is the most important issue here. Although I fail to see significant benefits from terminological renewal and am skeptical that new terms would be widely acknowledged, no harm is done either if a new term is proposed that covers textual, literary, redaction, and source criticism. I can only encourage Aejmelaeus to propose one and define it as clearly as possible. Perhaps my skepticism will be proven wrong. Regardless of terminology, it

65. See Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*. Similarly, many older commentaries cover textual and literary criticism on a high level. It should be noted that many of the text-critical variants that Wellhausen regarded as secondary were intentional scribal changes, which shows that text-critical variants were not assumed to be accidental mistakes even in nineteenth-century research.

is important to bring together scholars with an interest in the textual history of the Hebrew Bible. This is especially important since textual studies, and even the historical study of early Judaism in general, face fundamental challenges from approaches that in effect neglect the history of the texts. Scholars with a background in textual studies need to unite forces to show biblical scholarship at large how crucial these issues are.

3.5. Anneli Aejmelaesus: Second Response

Cooperation and exchange of ideas between representatives of the various branches of textual and literary research of the Hebrew Bible is no doubt of prime importance for the development of the field. None of us can master the whole field, and we also have our personal interests and inclinations, but we should be aware of the fact that it is one huge and complex puzzle—the textual and composition history of the biblical text—on which all of us are working with our own emphases. And we should occasionally look over the fence and see what our neighbors are doing; they may have found a piece that fits into our part of the puzzle. This we agree on.

It is no easy matter to introduce new terminology to adjust traditional methodology to the insights brought about by more recent discoveries, above all those from Qumran, even though these discoveries are no longer quite new, and their impact is already widely recognized. Any renewal may at first feel confusing, but it is more confusing to continue using old terminology that one fills with new meaning. Speaking of textual criticism when dealing with external textual evidence and literary criticism when dealing with text-internal evidence only gives the false impression that nothing has changed and the traditional borderline between the lower and higher criticism is still being upheld.

I would like to suggest a low-profile solution to this situation. What we can do is use old terminology in a new way. I think we should avoid using language that distinguishes between textual criticism and literary criticism as if they mean two separate procedures in the textual study of the Hebrew Bible. This is something each and every one of us can decide for ourselves, whether or not others join us. From now on, I simply decide to speak of *textual-literary criticism* or *research* and, if necessary, explain in a footnote or parenthesis that it is impossible to draw a borderline between textual and literary criticism as was conventional to do. I can also refrain from identifying myself as a textual critic and instead introduce myself as a researcher of the textual and composition history of the Hebrew Bible and

the Septuagint.⁶⁶ There are various ways to describe what kind of research one represents without making a distinction that no longer exists.

Our discussion seems not to make any exception to the observation that paradigm shifts generally take time and face resistance.⁶⁷ The present paradigm shift has already taken more than half a century. As Max Planck wrote in his autobiographical notes, “a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”⁶⁸ For this reason, it is decisive how we instruct our students and young researchers in methodology. The future of the textual-literary research of the Hebrew Bible is in their hands.

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66. In fact, a distinction can be made between research on the Hebrew Bible and on the Septuagint in that the task of textual criticism to recover the original text is sensible in the case of the Septuagint (which had its origin in the translation), whereas in the case of the Hebrew Bible it is impossible to reconstruct any one stage of the evolving text as *the* original text.

67. Thomas Kuhn, who initiated the term *paradigm shift*, describes the many obstacles to scientific revolutions in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

68. Max Planck, “A Scientific Autobiography,” in *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers*, trans. Frank Gaynor (London: William & Norgate, 1950), 13–51 (esp. 33–34).

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4

Methodological Challenges in the Study of Prophecy and Prophetic Books: A Conversation

Martti Nissinen and Dalit Rom-Shiloni

4.1. Martti Nissinen: Three Critical Issues in the Historical Study of Prophecy and the Prophetic Books

The previous chapters of this book gave a foretaste of how the historical-critical approach to the biblical text could be debated in an uncompromising but respectful manner, without the pressure of reaching an agreement but with a desire to listen to and communicate with, and even to learn from, colleagues representing diverging views. This chapter continues the conversation on adequate historical-critical methodology, zooming in on the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, especially the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is my pleasure to have this conversation with Dalit Rom-Shiloni (henceforth Dalit), who has invested considerable scholarly energy in the research of these books. Her theories of the emergence and historical situatedness of these texts are both well-argued and different enough from my own views to serve as a basis for a critical, fair, and potentially instructive debate. I thank Dalit for her readiness to engage in this scholarly exchange.

In the first part of this conversational round, I will present three critical issues related to the possibility of the historical study of the prophetic phenomenon and the biblical prophetic books: (1) the hard evidence as the result of textual transmission; (2) ancient Near Eastern prophecy as the point of comparison; and (3) the problem of dating the prophetic books. This part should be understood as a position statement, moving from what can be taken as generally accepted facts toward problems related to more hypothetical constructions. As a springboard, I will use

Dalit's recent article "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature: Challenging Paradigms That Control Our Academic Thought on Jeremiah and Ezekiel."¹ Since I am writing a contribution to a conversation rather than a research article, I will keep the footnotes to a minimum and refer to my own books, *Ancient Prophecy*, *Prophetic Divination*, and *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* for further arguments and literature.² In the second part, Dalit will present her critical comments on my position statement, and the third part will be a joint effort to look for common ground.

4.1.1. The Hard Evidence as the Result of Textual Transmission

The oldest extant textual witnesses of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as all other texts we know as a part of the Hebrew Bible, can be found among the scrolls found at Qumran and other sites close to the Dead Sea. The book of Jeremiah is attested in six manuscripts from the caves of Qumran (2QJer, 4QJer^a, 4QJer^b, 4QJer^c, 4QJer^d, 4QJer^e) and a couple of

1. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature: Challenging Paradigms That Control Our Academic Thought on Jeremiah and Ezekiel," *JBL* 138 (2019): 565–86. See also her many works on related subjects, e.g., Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel among the Exiles," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Ezekiel*, ed. Corrine Carvalho (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–35; Rom-Shiloni "What Is 'Persian' in Late Sixth Century BCE Prophetic Literature? Case-Studies and Criteria," in *On Dating Biblical Texts to the Persian Period: Discerning Criteria and Establishing Epochs*, ed. Richard J. Bautch and Mark Lackowski, *FAT* 2/101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 31–53; Rom-Shiloni; "Prophets in Jeremiah in Struggle over Leadership, or Rather over Prophetic Authority?," *Bib* 99 (2018): 351–72; Rom-Shiloni, "The Forest and the Trees: The Place of Pentateuchal Materials in Prophecy as of the Late Seventh/Early Sixth Centuries BCE," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016*, ed. Louis C. Jonker, Gideon R. Kotzé and Christl M. Maier, *VTSup* 177 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 56–92; Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (Sixth–Fifth Centuries BCE)*, *LHBOTS* 543 (London: T&T Clark, 2013); Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel and Jeremiah: What Might Stand Behind the Silence?," *HBAI* 2 (2012): 203–30.

2. Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Nissinen, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, *BZAW* 494 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019); Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, with contributions by C.-L. Seow, Robert K. Ritner, and H. Craig Melchert, 2nd ed., *WAW* 41 (Atlanta: SBL Press 2019).

small fragments from unknown sites (DSS F.Jer 1, DSS F.Jer 2, and XJer?).³ The book of Ezekiel likewise is represented by five or six manuscript fragments from Qumran (1QEzek, 3QEzek[?], 4QEzek^a, 4QEzek^b, 4QEzek^c, 11QEzek) and a large number of fragments of a single scroll from Masada (MasEzek).⁴

The scholarly consensus holds the view that the date of the earliest manuscript of the books of Jeremiah or Ezekiel is significantly later than the origins of the textual transmission of these books, which are usually dated to the time of the prophets after whom the books are named, that is, to the seventh–sixth centuries BCE. However, the fact remains that the oldest manuscript evidence dates to the first centuries BCE and CE. In my view, the late date of the extant textual evidence has not been taken seriously enough in the study of the prophetic (or even other) books of the Hebrew Bible, and even such a careful reader as Dalit does not pay much attention to it. The existing manuscripts demonstrate that textual transmission entails textual changes. No two manuscripts are identical, and this is not just a matter of scribal errors. Moreover, the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel represent different text types testifying to relatively large-scale changes that have taken place during the transmission of the text of these prophetic books.⁵ It is common knowledge that the Old Greek translation of the book of Jeremiah is based on a Hebrew *Vorlage* different from the Masoretic Text but represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QJer^b). The text of the Ezekiel fragments at Qumran is generally close to the Masoretic Text; however, the evidence may be too meager to say that it “encourages some confidence in the MT of Ezekiel, affirming the

3. See Armin Lange, “Texts of Jeremiah in the Qumran Library,” in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Redaction, and Interpretation*, ed. Bradford A. Anderson, Craig A. Evans, and Jack R. Lundbom, VTSup 178 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 280–302.

4. See George J. Brooke, “Ezekiel in Some Qumran and New Testament Texts,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March 1991*, ed. Julio Treballe Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner, STDJ 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1:317–37; Shemaryahu Talmon, “Fragments of an Ezekiel Scroll from Masada 1043–2220 (Ezekiel 35:11–38:14),” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 53*–69*.

5. See Ville Mäkipelto, Timo Tekoniemi, and Miika Tucker, “Large-Scale Transpositions as an Editorial Technique in the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible,” *TC* 22 (2017): 1–16, <http://jbt.org/v22/TC-2017-Makipelto-Tekoniemi-Tucker.pdf>.

antiquity of the text it preserves.”⁶ The book of Ezekiel, too, seems to have existed in versions of different length, as the second-century CE Greek P. 967 demonstrates.⁷

Apart from the large-scale changes, the observable variants may seem to us for the most part small and trivial. However, what we see in the extant manuscript evidence is probably but the tip of the iceberg, for the most part hiding the changes that have taken place during the centuries of textual transmission. What we can see now undeniably testifies to the changeability and malleability of the textual tradition, however authoritative, by the turn of the Common Era and before. The once-powerful idea of an *Urtext* that was changed or corrupted in the hands of subsequent scribal generations has traditionally meant the appreciation of the Hebrew Masoretic Text as a virtual norm, the deviations from which were more often than not regarded as evidence of such corruption. This idea is no longer viable, as the Masoretic Text can no longer be elevated above other early text types, and the agenda of textual criticism has moved from the search for the original Hebrew text to more refined explanations of the textual plurality that reckon with textual growth and editorial revisions taking place simultaneously, hence combining the agendas of textual criticism, *Literarkritik*, and redaction criticism.⁸ Even the manuscript evidence of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, or any other prophetic book, testifies to variant textual forms being used and developed concurrently. We can see that the Qumran movement seems to have tolerated at least two different kinds of Jeremiah scrolls despite the conviction expressed in several of their writings that the prophets indeed were the authors of the prophetic books.⁹

Thus, we know that textual changes took place. Since, however, the extant evidence of the transmission of the prophetic books hides centuries of textual development, revealing only its latest phases, it is difficult if not impossible to be confident of any part of the books of Jeremiah or Ezekiel

6. Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, LHBOTS 482 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 48.

7. See, e.g., Ingrid E. Lilly, *Two Books of Ezekiel: Papyrus 967 and the Masoretic Text as Variant Literary Editions*, VTSup 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

8. See Ville Mäkipelto, “An Integrative Approach to Textual History: How Fluid Textual Traditions Challenge Methodology,” *BN* 186 (2020): 29–49. See also the discussion between Anneli Aejmelaeus and Juha Pakkala in this volume.

9. Martti Nissinen, “Transmitting Divine Mysteries: The Prophetic Role of Wisdom Teaches in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 638–42.

deriving from the seventh or sixth century BCE without further arguments. A priori datings are excluded, and the Masoretic Text (or the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint translation) can neither be equated with an *Urtext* of any kind nor with the final form of the prophetic book since neither the *Urtext* nor the final form actually exists. In the absence of hard evidence, all dates predating those of the extant manuscripts must be argued for and, if possible, substantiated. How can this be done—and why should it be done?

Traditionally, the answer to the question why is clear: to get as close as possible to the very words spoken (or written) by the prophet. Older scholarship wanted to do away with the text created by the later editors or epigones to crystallize the actual message of the original prophet; or, as Dalit puts it, to differentiate between the “prophetic speakers” and the “prophetic writers,” the former being given higher stature than the latter.¹⁰ Later, much more emphasis has been put on the anonymous editors, now enjoying more appreciation, and on the entire process of the emergence of the prophetic books.¹¹ Still, the quest for the prophets and their time has not been abandoned—not only or even primarily because of the interest in the prophets themselves as historical personalities but also because of the firm conviction (or at least hope) that the prophetic books can be used as sources for the history of the time of their setting. How, then, could we possibly go centuries back from the date of the extant textual evidence with any degree of probability?

Both synchronic and diachronic methodologies have been developed to tackle the historical problem.¹² Diachronic analysis may attempt to separate the later additions from the original or oldest detectable core identified with the authentic message of the prophet, or it may try to reconstruct the process of redaction and/or *Fortschreibung* without laying a special emphasis on the prophet and his putative disciples. Synchronic reading, eschewing the reconstruction of editorial history, may focus on the prophet and his time, allowing later dates only exceptionally, unless it interprets the entire text against the backdrop of a later period and a later stage of textual transmission. Both synchronic and diachronic approaches are replete with problems that relativize their results when it comes to historical reconstruction. Synchronic readings tend to operate with a priori

10. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 566–73.

11. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 573–77.

12. Martti Nissinen, “The Book of Hosea and the Last Days of the Northern Kingdom: The Methodological Problem,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 615–19.

datings that I have rejected above as inappropriate. Diachronic readings, on the other hand, produce ever-changing results, as can be expected if the analysis is based on text-internal criteria.¹³

All this does not invalidate the search for historical traces in the prophetic books. The books are anchored in real history, even though they often hide more than they reveal. Prophets existed in the ancient Near East, including the southern Levant, whether or not the prophetic figures mentioned in the Hebrew Bible always go back to historical personalities. Reconstructing historical circumstances is a legitimate task in the study of prophecy and prophetic books. However, finding the keyholes through which history is somehow visible requires critical reading of the sources in awareness of the ultimate impossibility of reaching absolute results. The late date of the earliest textual witnesses and the nature of textual transmission as documented by the available evidence are true problems that make the hermeneutical priority of earliest possible datings highly questionable.

4.1.2. Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy as the Point of Comparison

A few decades ago, historical study of prophecy could be done with minimal or no reference to other ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts. Those days are over, thanks to the growing corpus of texts documenting prophecy in different parts of the Near East,¹⁴ which give compelling reasons to regard biblical prophecy as another, however distinctive, offshoot of the ancient Near Eastern prophetic phenomenon. Other important methodological questions regarding the use of the Near Eastern sources as the point of comparison for the study of biblical prophecy are: How and why should biblical texts be compared with Near Eastern texts considered their parallels, and what do we want to prove with such a comparison?¹⁵ Is biblical prophecy seen as another variety of ancient Near Eastern or eastern Mediterranean prophecy, or, rather, is extrabiblical prophecy used as a reservoir of parallels whenever helpful in clarifying a biblical issue?

13. See the conversation between Francis Borchardt, Cynthia Edenburg, Juha Pakkala, and Jason Silverman in this book; also, Cynthia Edenburg, "Falsifiable Hypotheses, Alternate Hypotheses and the Methodological Conundrum of Biblical Exegesis," *ZAW* 132 (2020): 383–401.

14. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*.

15. See Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 43–51; Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources: Principles and a Test Case," in *Prophetic Divination*, 377–96.

Sometimes one may get the impression that the Near Eastern sources are needed first and foremost to underpin the historicity of biblical prophets and prophecy, the analogy leading to the reinforcement of the biblical account's authenticity. However, acknowledging the transcultural and transtemporal nature of the comparison between prophetic sources makes the issue more complicated.

The Near Eastern documents of prophecy are duly acknowledged by Dalit, who finds important analogies to draw on in ancient Near Eastern prophetic material, especially the use of the theological message as a political message.¹⁶ This observation is used as an argument against what she presents as the tendency of redaction critics to suppose that "ancient Yahwistic prophecies originally had no theological agenda and were elaborated upon with theological reflections and messages only by later nonprophetic tradents."¹⁷ Whether or not this gives a fair picture of the redaction critics in general, it is true that, for instance, the Assyrian prophetic oracles indeed contain a theological message serving as a sharp political weapon.¹⁸ The analogy between biblical and Assyrian prophetic texts exists, and the question to be mulled over is the historical conclusiveness of such an analogy. If biblical prophecy, or ancient Israelite/Judean prophecy, is seriously considered part of the ancient Near Eastern prophetic phenomenon, such analogies cannot be dismissed since they may arise from a shared historical background. However, as in every comparison, it is important to know what is being compared, lest one compares apples and pears.¹⁹

The available Mesopotamian, Levantine, and Greek sources make it abundantly clear that the basic models of noninductive, or inspired,

16. Rom-Shiloni, "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature," 580–82.

17. Rom-Shiloni, "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature," 580. Dalit's main targets of criticism are Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn and Nathan MacDonald, Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 2 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015); and Konrad Schmid, "How to Date the Book of Jeremiah: Combining and Modifying Linguistic- and Profile-Based Approaches," *VT* 68 (2018): 1–19.

18. Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, SAA 9 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), 1–11 = Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 68–96.

19. See Joachim Schaper, "Prophecy in Israel and Assyria: Are We Comparing Apples and Pears? The Materiality of Writing and the Avoidance of Parallelomania," in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, ed. Hans M. Barstad and Robert P. Gordon (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 224–38.

divination were by and large similar in this geographical area in ancient times down at least to the early Common Era. The prophetic process of communication is roughly similar everywhere, including the alleged divine sender of the message, the intermediary, and the addressee surrounded by a community that ultimately decides whether or not the prophecy should be taken seriously. The same even holds true for the gestalt of a prophet. A distinctive element of ecstasy, or altered state of consciousness, is associated with the prophetic performance not only in Greek and Mesopotamian sources but also in the Hebrew Bible, the figure of the prophet Ezekiel providing a prime example of it.²⁰ Biblical prophets such as Jeremiah are often found communicating with and sometimes squaring up to royal and religious authorities, a scenario that corresponds to the socioreligious setting of prophets in and around temples and the royal court in other eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian sources.²¹ Even the lack of gender specificity of the prophetic role is a shared feature in the sources known to us.²² All this probably goes back to a general and shared tradition of inspired divination and is, therefore, relevant for comparison and religiohistorical reconstruction. A feature in one source does not directly prove anything concerning a similar or different feature in another source coming from a different time and place, but this is not a reason to dismiss the analogies and family resemblances between the sources. Each case must be studied individually, and comparison does not need to build on contagion. We just need to decide why we need to read the one source in order to understand the other.²³

All this said, the common features should not make us turn a blind eye to the features specific to the presentation of prophets and prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. An often-made observation is the number of many biblical prophets' assaults against authorities, whether royal or religious. This does not set biblical prophets categorically apart from their Near Eastern colleagues as such,²⁴ but the different balance between supportive and

20. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 171–200.

21. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 201–96.

22. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 297–325; Nissinen, “Non-male Prophets in Ancient Near Eastern Sources,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 127–52.

23. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 43–51.

24. Martti Nissinen, “Das kritische Potential in der altorientalischen Prophetie,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 163–94.

unsupportive prophecies raises questions concerning the critical disposition of the biblical prophets. The image of the biblical prophet may include elements that are atypical for a prophet in the comparative material: a prophet like Isaiah communicates with the king more directly than any of his Mesopotamian counterparts and himself performs a healing ritual; prophets like Elijah and Elisha can be found performing miracles and practicing magical rituals including healing, and so on.²⁵ The question arises whether the biblical prophets' multitasking belongs to a different divinatory tradition, whether the lack of such a cluster of functions in other sources is due to the fragmentary documentation that may hide important features of Near Eastern and Greek prophets or whether the image of biblical prophets is due to an accumulation of features during the long textual transmission.²⁶

The historical study of the prophetic books must rely on more robust source material than just the prophetic sources. The prophetic books form part of ancient Near Eastern literature and reflect the cultural, religious, and sociopolitical influences throughout the process of textual transmission. Historical echoes from the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic periods can be heard in the literary mouths of biblical prophets, and sometimes these echoes may help to determine the historical setting of a text at least to some degree of probability. In the book of Ezekiel, for instance, scholars have found lexical, cultural, and ideological features that are likely to depend on Mesopotamian, if not distinctly Babylonian, language, iconography, and religion.²⁷ Without absolutely locating the book of Ezekiel in time and place, this implies that the book of Ezekiel must have been written in an environment where the adaptation of such features was possible. We know that there were communities of Judeans in Babylonia, but, unfortunately, the sources do not say much about their religious or scribal activities.²⁸

25. See my "The Ritual Aspect of Prophecy," in *Prophecy and Its Cultic Dimensions*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, JAJSup 31 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 101–14.

26. For the development of the character of the prophet Elisha, for instance, see Timo Tekoniemi, "Enhancing the Depiction of a Prophet: The Repercussions of Textual Criticism for the Study of the Elisha Cycle," *BN* 186 (2020): 75–106.

27. Martti Nissinen, "(How) Does the Book of Ezekiel Reveal Its Babylonian Context?," in *Prophetic Divination*, 597–612.

28. See Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE*, CHANE 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

4.1.3. The Problem of Dating the Prophetic Books

Prophetic performances are sometimes connected to writing and scribal practices, not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in the Mari correspondence and in the letters from Lachish, as well as in the temples of Apollo at Didyma and Claros.²⁹ As a rule, however, the prophets themselves do not write.³⁰ Jeremiah resorts to the services of Baruch the scribe (Jer 36:4, 32), and Ezekiel eats the scroll instead of writing it (Ezek 3:1–3). The prophets of the Hebrew Bible may be said to scrape together a few words (Isa 8:1–2; Ezek 24:1–3; 37:15–16) or perhaps a single oracle (Isa 30:8; Hab 2:2), which does not imply authoring anything as large as prophetic books; moreover, the verb כתב does not always imply that the subject of the verb is writing.³¹ Only in Chronicles are the prophets featured as the authors of books (2 Chr 26:22). This idea prevails later in the Dead Sea Scrolls and even in the modern idea of writing prophets, which associates the production of each prophetic book with the person of the author-prophet. The early diachronic method (*Literarkritik*) aimed exactly at filtering out the parts of a prophetic book, going back to its original author, the prophet. On the other hand, today's synchronic readings (unless they take the entire book as the product of a much later period) often read the text as the scribal product of the prophet unless the opposite is proven. I have rejected both approaches above as historically misleading.

If the prophets probably did not write, the scribes certainly wrote prophecies. Their work was not just simple recording of the prophets' oral performances; rather, the scribes should be seen as the actual authors of the prophetic texts from the first draft to more developed literary works. At the simplest, the *written prophecy* may be the scribe's summary (and, inevitably, his interpretation) of the content of the prophet's performance, but it may also be based on the report of one or more go-betweens. More-

29. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, nos. 48, 139. For Didyma and Claros, see Manfred Lesgourgues, "Gods' Secretaries: On Preserving Oracles in the Greek Oracular Shrines during Hellenistic and Roman Times," in *When Gods Speak to Men: Divine Speech according to Textual Sources in the Ancient Mediterranean Basin*, ed. Stéphanie Anthonioz, Alice Mouton, and Daniel Petit, OBO 289 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 105–20.

30. Martti Nissinen, "Since When Do Prophets Write?," in *Prophetic Divination*, 517–37.

31. See Jer 32:10–12. Note that the causative *hiphil* form of the verb כתב is never used in the Hebrew Bible.

over, the written product may have been edited for archival purposes and included in a collection to be used by other scribes. Sometimes the wording of the oracle may be better classified as *literary prophecy*, that is, part of a literary work not based on any real-life performance. All this is observable in the Near Eastern and Greek texts and even in the Hebrew Bible, where, however, the process of transmission from written to literary prophecy has gone on much longer.³²

The textual transmission of the biblical text, the latest phases of which can still be seen or detected in the manuscript evidence, has created a considerable temporal distance between the text and the event, and the lack of manuscript evidence predating the Dead Sea Scrolls hides the scribal process that can only be reconstructed from the available material. Therefore, I can only partially subscribe to what Dalit writes: “The extant extrabiblical materials on prophecy and the abundant biblical sources substantiate the assumption that prophecies had their initial role as ad hoc proclamations in times of crisis, and they could have been written (or recorded) close to the events or later on.”³³ As Dalit rightly points out, this can be said of Mesopotamian prophecies with a reasonable degree of confidence.³⁴ But do the biblical texts really substantiate this assumption or just build on the common Near Eastern pattern?

The scribes who worked on the prophetic books were clearly well enough aware of the functions and dynamics of the prophetic phenomenon to use them as the backdrop of their interpretation and to enrich the image and the message of the prophets with new features that go back to their imagination rather than historical realities. Such features may have a decisive effect on what is put in the prophets’ mouths, which finally leads us to the important—and from my point of view the most difficult—issue raised by Dalit regarding the theological and ideological agendas that some prophetic books share with each other. She uses the motif of the “evil from the north” in the book of Jeremiah (1:13–14; 4:6; 6:1) as an example of what scholars have interpreted as secondary theological interpretations³⁵ but that, according to her, “may just as well belong to the early stages of

32. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 98–115, 127–43, 150–67.

33. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 584–85.

34. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 581. See Martti Nissinen, “Marduk’s Return and Reconciliation in a Prophetic Letter from Arbela (with Simo Parpola),” in *Prophetic Divination*, 245–65.

35. The reference is made to Schmid, “How to Date the Book of Jeremiah.”

putting oral prophecies into writing ... those assumed *Fortschreibungen*, or innerbiblical literary interpretations, may all be part of a well-recorded contemporaneous theological discourse.”³⁶ In my view, there are too many “may”s here to justify the bold conclusion: “There is *no need* to view them diachronically as reflecting religious developments over time, just as there is *no reason* to assume later dates (Persian or Hellenistic) for those theological reflections.”³⁷ In fact, earlier scholarship has presented numerous reasons to think so, and these should not be dismissed without falsifying the arguments.

In Dalit’s view, “the *Fortschreibung* paradigm ... treats the earlier stages of prophetic oracles as devoid of theological message, and it suggests a linear diachrony of theological development, according to which only bold and at times nontheological expressions constitute the early stages of prophecy, while other, more properly theological reflections are understood to represent the later layers within the Persian and even Hellenistic periods.”³⁸ Representing the said paradigm myself, I vigorously disagree because, in my view, the idea of *Fortschreibung* implies neither the lack of theological message in earlier materials nor specific datings, which have to be argued for case by case.³⁹ I am relieved to read, however, that Dalit accepts “the plausible approach of literary growth and *Fortschreibung* in prophetic literature”⁴⁰ in principle, so that the problem for her, if I read her correctly, is not the idea itself but the way it is detected in the biblical text. The biggest difference between the readings of Dalit and the scholars she criticizes is, ultimately, not the use of the diachronic method as such but the place of the prophet and his time in its implementation. She energetically resists the tendency of Persian–Hellenistic datings in favor of the (early) sixth century BCE and earlier, searching for the earliest stages of textual development and their historical contexts. The primary

36. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 580.

37. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 580, emphases added.

38. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 580–81.

39. Walther Zimmerli, who launched the term *Fortschreibung* with regard to the book of Ezekiel, would probably have opposed this characterization; see, e.g., “Das Phänomen der ‘Fortschreibung’ im Buche Ezechiel,” in *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday 6 September 1980*, ed. J. A. Emerton, BZAW 150 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 174–91.

40. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 582.

methodological question is, therefore, how a particular dating can be corroborated with any degree of probability.

I share Dalit's conviction that prophecies carried a theological message from the very beginning—as divine-human communication, a prophetic oracle without a theological message would hardly have made any sense. I also agree that not all theological and literary topics in prophetic books were invented after the sixth century BCE. In any case, the observation that the same theological topics and agendas keep recurring time and again in different books raises the question of how this intertextuality should be explained. We seem to agree that there is no way around the diachronic approach, since intertextuality is necessarily an intertemporal phenomenon; however, the approach itself does not entail absolute but only relative datings. Dalit acknowledges this when she writes that “such [intertextual] connections were already in use by the prophets, as well as continuously utilized by the prophets' immediate followers or tradents,” exemplifying this with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both of whom “were knowledgeable in the national traditions” such as pentateuchal, legal, and prophetic traditions.⁴¹ But how do we know who knew what and when; where and to whom were the intertexts available? Answering these questions easily leads to circular reasoning, especially if the research agenda lays special emphasis on a certain period of time, be it the sixth century BCE or the Persian period. Evidently, “it is not the method that is faulty; instead, the presuppositions governing the analyses need to be examined and put to the test.”⁴² What makes testing difficult is that the same observations may lead to contrasting results, and the same features can be seen as proof of original unity or of textual growth, depending on whether the researcher is looking for unity or disunity.

In the absence of textual evidence from the times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and even shortly thereafter, absolute datings are difficult to draw from the Masoretic Text or other extant textual witnesses. This, as I have argued before,⁴³ should not lead to relying on default positions, such as preferring the prophet for the editor, early datings for late datings, or textual unity for disunity, because (1) the principal object of our study is the source text, not the prophet; (2) the study of prophetic books is not principally about *intentio auctoris* but an analysis of the text itself as a

41. Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 585.

42. Edenburg, “Falsifiable Hypotheses,” 388.

43. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy*, 145.

material product, together with its background, production, and reception; (3) the unity or coherence of a text can be considered neither a proof of quality nor evidence for its single authorship; (4) the Masoretic Text represents neither the primary nor the final, let alone the normative form of the text of any prophetic book; and (5) the burden of proof concerns every dating.

I am happy to expose the thoughts and claims I presented above to Dalit's criticism and counterclaims. The issues I would like to discuss with her include the following:

- ◆ What are the implications of the date of the extant manuscript evidence for the historical study of the prophetic books?
- ◆ Are there reasons to prioritize the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and their time in the historical reconstruction?
- ◆ What is the main contribution of ancient Near Eastern sources to the study of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible in general and the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular?
- ◆ Is there a way of reaching a historically reliable picture of prophecy in the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel?

4.2. Dalit Rom-Shiloni: The Study of Prophecy, Prophetic Writings, and the Prophetic Books—A Response

Martti Nissinen's (henceforth Martti) invitation to this scholarly discussion came as a surprise, a very pleasant one, I must say.⁴⁴ Having read many of his important contributions on prophecy and prophetic literature over the years, I am truly honored that Martti counts my studies engaging enough to raise with me the "three critical issues" (p. 103) he finds to be at the core of our different approaches to the prophetic phenomenon and to prophetic writings. I am, therefore, wholeheartedly grateful to Martti for this opportunity.

I hereby follow Martti's sequence. I will address each of his points in turn and answer his questions as I go. I hope that this scholarly discussion will move all of us to new ways of thinking about how to reach the elusive developments that shaped the last phases of the prophetic books.

44. I am grateful to Dr. Ruth Clements for her insightful thoughts and comments on an earlier version of this part.

As a preliminary note, let me clarify my interest in prophecy and prophetic literature. The fundamental issue on which Martti and I differ is the nature and extent of what Martti introduced above as “the possibility of the historical study of the prophetic phenomenon and the biblical prophetic books.” But what kind of history are we hoping to recover?

My interest in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the prophets and their books, arose out of my study of late seventh–early sixth century Judahite theology(/ies). The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are two of the biblical sources that directly comprehend and react to the atrocities of the Destruction and the Babylonian exile, along with selected Psalms, Lamentations, and the historiography of the Book of Kings.⁴⁵ Interrogating these various biblical sources together—historiography, prophecy, psalmodic poetry—allowed me to draw a broad theological map of the different and ever-polemical approaches to major theological issues raised by the Destruction. Thus, my studies do not aim at validating the historicity of the prophetic personae, nor at looking for the prophetic *ipsissima verba*. I am in agreement with Martti about the complications, and in many cases the impossibility, of trying to get back to original prophetic pronouncements. Furthermore, I fully appreciate the long literary (and transmission) processes undergone by prophecies, prophetic collections, and prophetic books. The many apt methodological challenges Martti has raised concerning Hebrew Bible prophets and prophetic literature are those I constantly find myself struggling with as well.

Indeed, my descriptive and comparative theological study allowed me to situate these diverse biblical sources in a shared historical milieu; they may be taken to reflect the theological discourse among Judeans of various social (and literary) circles from the late seventh–early sixth century BCE, and possibly later. Due to the broad sweep of the historical arena represented by this literature, however, I cannot easily dismiss the diverse voices embedded in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as late literary products of scribal activity extending long after the sixth century BCE. With these points in mind, I turn to Martti’s three issues.

45. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Voices from the Ruins: Theodicy and the Fall of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021). I also published a Hebrew book on this general topic, *God in Times of Destruction and Exiles: Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) Theology* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2009).

4.2.1. The Hard Evidence as the Result of Textual Transmission

In several studies, Martti emphasizes that the earliest hard evidence we have for the prophetic writings is the fragmentary Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴⁶ There are, of course, several centuries' difference of time between "the origins of the textual transmission of these books" (that is, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and the scrolls. I agree with many of the points Martti has raised above and do accept his recognition that "the extant manuscript evidence is probably but the tip of the iceberg, for the most part hiding the changes that have taken place during the centuries of textual transmission."

However, I disagree with Martti's assessment of this evidence on two important points. First, a fundamental presupposition of textual criticism for any biblical book is that critical analysis pushes behind extant evidence to whatever degree, to unravel some of the currents of both textual and literary development. This is as true for the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls as it is for the Leningrad Codex. In the present instance, the work of Emanuel Tov, Armin Lange, and others on the Jeremiah manuscripts, among other biblical scrolls, reveals the stability as well as the fluidity of the biblical Jeremiah.⁴⁷ Sketching pre-first-century textual and literary expansions of the Jeremiah biblical texts also helps sketch the frame from which these developments sprang and may even push our recognition of a stable Jeremiah text back beyond the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint.⁴⁸

Second, in a number of places Martti and others have expressed the concomitant idea that the nonbiblical texts among the scrolls provide whatever hard evidence we have for the practice of literary prophecy, which is assumed to have developed within scribal circles during the Persian period and beyond (while this is not stated explicitly above, it is among Martti's underlying assumptions).⁴⁹ Scholars who hold this position often draw connections from the interpretive practices found in these nonbiblical Qumran texts to processes of *Fortschreibung*, intertextuality, and interpretation found

46. Nissinen, "Transmitting Divine Mysteries," 631–80.

47. Emanuel Tov and Eugene Ulrich, "Textual History of the Hebrew Bible," in *Overview Articles*, ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, THB 1A (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–34; Armin Lange, "Texts of Jeremiah."

48. Georg Fischer, "Septuagint, Jeremiah," in *Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, THB 1B, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 543–56.

49. See Martti Nissinen, "Pesharim as Divination: Qumran Exegesis, Omen Interpretation and Literary Prophecy," in *Prophetic Divination*, 663–80.

within the biblical prophetic writings.⁵⁰ These connections then lead them to date interpretive features within what Martti calls *biblical prophecy* as late phenomena, products of Second Temple-period scribal activity, and as very late elaborations on *ancient Hebrew prophecy* (to use Martti's terminology again).⁵¹

On the basis of my own work, I think there is a risk of an anachronistic misreading of both biblical and Qumran texts. Michael Fishbane, Benjamin Sommer, and others have outlined the practice of innerbiblical interpretation as a compositional practice already embedded in the formation of biblical texts, among them prophetic ones.⁵² Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the parabiblical Jeremiah and Ezekiel texts, and quotations of the biblical prophetic books in diverse genres of nonbiblical Qumran writings, testify to the place of these prophetic writings as accepted authoritative literature by the late Second Temple period (which necessarily presumes

50. This line of thought goes back to Odil Hannes Steck's influential study, *The Prophetic Books and Their Theological Witness*, trans. James D. Nogalski (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); and see Martti's "Pesharim as Divination" (Nissinen, "Pesharim as Divination," 663–80) in which he connects the pesharim exegetical tradition within scribal exegesis to the practice of divination and connects this exegetical genre to "the shift from oral to scribal prophecy" that "also reflects a development in the concept from a speaker to a scribe" (678).

51. For Martti's distinctions between ancient Hebrew prophecy and biblical prophecy, see Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources," esp. 389–90; and already "What Is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective," in *Prophetic Divination*, 53–73.

52. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*, Contraversions (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Sommer, "Inner-biblical Interpretation," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Mark Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1835–40. I should also mention here a few of my own studies: Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Deuteronomistic Concepts of Exile Interpreted in Jeremiah and Ezekiel," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies In the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Post-biblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 101–12; Rom-Shiloni, "How Can You Say, 'I Am Not Defiled' (Jer 2:20–25): Allusions to Priestly Legal Traditions in the Poetry of Jeremiah," *JBL* 133 (2014): 757–75; Rom-Shiloni, "Compositional Harmonization: Priestly and Deuteronomistic References in Jeremiah—An Earlier Stage of a Recognized Interpretive Technique," in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 913–42; Rom-Shiloni, "Forest and the Trees."

a longer prehistory of some stability, as does the scribal evidence of the biblical texts themselves).⁵³ Moreover, reading the scrolls as mere extensions of literary biblical prophecy might cause us to miss the very real implications of these later Second Temple writings; that is, that more than illustrating developments within biblical prophetic texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate their early reception history. The practice of peshar testifies both to the authoritative and received status of prophetic books and to the self-understanding of the sectarians not as prophets or tradents themselves but as authoritative *interpreters* of these authoritative texts.⁵⁴ Therefore, I would argue that in fact the phenomenon of innerbiblical interpretation provides models and impetus for the pesharim and other interpretive texts—but the Dead Sea Scrolls (along with other more widely known Second Temple texts such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch) themselves constitute significantly new genres that set them apart from the biblical texts that they interpret. This phenomenological distinction may actually serve as another argument to distinguish biblical prophetic writings from their manuscript evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In answer, then, to Martti's question, "What are the implications of the date of the extant manuscript evidence for the historical study of the prophetic books?" I propose to Martti that we envision the text-critical evidence of the scrolls more positively, in terms of how it may help us push back further some of the processes of gradual literary evolution of any of

53. Ruth Clements, in written correspondence: "The Qumranites were eclectic librarians, and although they could inscribe variants in any number of texts for peshar purposes, they were also guardians of what they considered authoritative text forms. For Jeremiah, anyway, their preferred text to quote was a proto-MT type, even though they had a proto-LXX copy and some 'non-aligned' ones in the library. So it is not only the book, but a set form of the book, that is already in preferential use for that community by that time." See Armin Lange, "Jeremiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Textual History of Jeremiah in Light of the Qumran Library," in *The Textual History of the Bible from the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Biblical Manuscripts of the Vienna Papyrus Collection: Papers from the Fifteenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 10–13 April 2016*, ed. Ruth A. Clements et al., STDJ 137 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 43–154.

54. For the peshar as "reading their present in light of the Scriptures" and thus serving identity reconstructions of the community, see Jutta Jokiranta, "Pesharim: A Mirror of Self-Understanding," in *Reading the Present in the Qumran Library: The Perception of the Contemporary by Means of Scriptural Interpretations*, ed. Kristin De Troyer and Armin Lange, SymS 30 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 23–34, esp. 34.

the Hebrew Bible books and corpora even if such investigations require us to cautiously speculate on the unknown. However, let me say again that, although the Scrolls provide us ample evidence of the evolution of *scribal* practices in the Second Temple period, I think it is both inaccurate and methodologically risky to posit the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence for practices of *biblical prophecy*.

I appreciate Martti's recognition that there are in fact "historical traces in the prophetic books," and I agree with Martti's insistence that "all dates predating those of the extant manuscripts must be argued for and, if possible, substantiated."⁵⁵ The question then becomes *how* (echoing Martti) we can move back from "the extant textual evidence with any degree of probability"? This question applies to the entire Hebrew Bible, not only the prophetic literature. Looking specifically at the prophetic literature, and especially the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, I find *the issue of criteria* for distinguishing layers of literary evolution to be our great challenge. Here especially, the insights to be gained from the Dead Sea Scrolls into the process of textual transmission can be of great help, and I hope we can address this area in section three of this conversation.

4.2.2. Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy as the Point of Comparison

Martti raises here the question he has amply discussed in various papers: "How and why should biblical texts be compared with Near Eastern texts considered their parallels, and what do we want to prove with such a comparison?"⁵⁶ Above, Martti adds a warning against comparing apples and pears, which augments his earlier warning that such a comparison "easily leads to sweeping generalizations or to a goal-directed exploitation of ancient Near Eastern sources to justify Bible-based and sometimes questionable claims," stated clearly in his 2010 paper "Comparing Pro-

55. See also his paper on Hosea, *Nissinen*, "Book of Hosea and the Last Days," 613–27. For a careful attempt to find an eighth-century BCE background to prophecies in Isaiah 1–39, see Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, ANEM 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); and see also Matthijs J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies*, VTSup 117 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 169–70.

56. See *Nissinen*, *Ancient Prophecy*, 43–51; *Nissinen*, "Pesharim as Divination," 663–80, and more often.

phetic Sources: Principles and Test Case.”⁵⁷ Here again, Martti’s distinction between *biblical prophecy* and *ancient Hebrew prophecy* is germane to the question of ancient Near Eastern sources.

I want to focus briefly on Martti’s question of what we are comparing by looking at another valuable paper. In “Oracles as Artefacts” (2019), Martti pays careful attention to what otherwise could have remained only a well-known slogan, “the medium is the message” (Marshall McLuhan).⁵⁸ In this paper, Martti argues that the actual artifacts, written products of prophecy in ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultures, have a crucial influence on the genre, content, and message of prophecy. Martti discusses four very different materials on which prophetic texts were written: the clay (cuneiform) tablets of Neo-Assyrian collections of prophecies from Nineveh; the Deir Alla wall-inscription(s), ink on plaster; the Clarian oracles, inscribed on building-block slabs from Hierapolis; and the prophetic biblical collections of the Dead Sea Scrolls, ink on parchment, from Qumran. Martti uses four parameters of comparison to discuss these artifacts—scribes, sponsors, audiences, and purposes—through which he articulates the uniqueness of each of his four examples.⁵⁹

The primary point of the article is that materiality must be taken into account when studying ancient Near Eastern prophecy because it affects composition, portability, and content, as well as scholarly perceptions of audience and purpose. This has two consequences for the question of comparison that I would like to highlight. One (perhaps obvious) is that the implications drawn through comparison must be carefully nuanced. I disagree with Martti that differences in material should necessarily imply essential differences in practice. Do the presumed differences between writing materials used by Neo-Assyrian scribes recording prophecies

57. Nissinen, “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 379. Martti further recognizes “the Bible-centered perspective” on prophecy as a real danger, but nevertheless he argues that “all this evidence justifies the statement that we are only beginning to recognize fully ... that biblical prophecy is but a part—though a distinctive and in many ways unique part—of a larger picture.”

58. Martti Nissinen, “Oracles as Artefacts: The Material Aspect of Prophecy,” in *When Gods Speak to Men: Divine Speech according to Textual Sources in the Ancient Mediterranean Basin*, ed. Stéphanie Anthonioz, Alice Mouton, Daniel Petit, OBO 289 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 49–65. Martti phrased his opinion on a comparative study in the call: “compare sources, not prophets” already in “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 385.

59. Nissinen, “Oracles as Artefacts,” 63–64.

in cuneiform, and those used by the scribes-recorders of Hebrew Bible prophecy, justify the assumptions that clay tablets represent exact reports (or even just summaries), whereas prophecies written in ink on parchment must be paraphrases and expansions?⁶⁰ Furthermore, I suspect that the differences in writing materials do not embody crucial distinctions between those sources in terms of the nature of prophecy and the evolution of prophetic writings (see discussion below).⁶¹

Second, at the close of “Oracles as Artefacts,” Martti reiterates that “the only access to the ancient prophetic phenomenon” is restricted by the materials of writing, thus governed by the ways scribes understood the messages of the prophecies, and shaped (and re-shaped) them. This foregoing assumption underlies Martti’s approach to prophecies written on scrolls:

The scroll appears as the foremost vehicle of interpretation of textual tradition that in the case of prophecy may be more intensive and creative

60. Two short comments on the improbability of connecting artifact to scribal techniques in ancient Near Eastern sources: (1) The Nineveh Oracles bring full-fledged prophecies in both the horizontal individual prophecies and in the vertical tablets holding collections (Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, liii–lxii, and the actual texts; and Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 97–101); (2) The Deir Alla inscription, ink on plaster, sets another obstacle to the tight connection between artifact and text. Martti accepts Erhard Blum’s observations and counts this inscription as “an edited compilation” (“Oracles as Artefacts,” 55). I wonder in what ways this observation is connected to, or determined by, the artifact?

61. To set a counter example, in Hebrew Bible prophecy we do find short summaries of prophecies, such as שלום שָׁלוֹם (e.g., Jer 6:14; Ezek 13:10), or just a kind of a prescript in יהוה נאם האמרים (Ezek 13:6). Interestingly, such summaries (or short-enings) are limited to delegitimizing the peace prophets whose words are immediately refuted by the prophets. Those elaborate prophetic refutational comments by all means could be termed as interpretations (*Fortschreibungen*) proclaimed by the legitimate prophetic voices of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (be they the prophets or later tradents, followers). Hence, it seems that the artifact cannot be counted as the reason for this one-word summary (or short prescript) of what we could only assume were broader prophetic proclamations of “the peace prophets” (e.g., several words in Jer 14:15aβ; 37:19b; up to a few verses, Jer 28:2–4, 10–11). Interpretations/reactions to those rejected prophecies should not be taken as evidence of secondary/scribal hands. Rather, I would say that the two techniques—summary word(s) and a more elaborate prophetic proclamation—which often may be polemical or even interpretive, are part and parcel of the rhetorical devices of prophetic proclamations, and they are both utilized within Hebrew Bible prophetic writings.

than in any other material known to us.... Prophetic books are essentially the result of intellectual scribal (rather than ecstatic-prophetic) performances. The Dead Sea Scrolls are the earliest available witnesses of the practice that transformed prophecy into scribal interpretation of authoritative tradition.⁶²

I cannot but wonder why the Dead Sea Scrolls should be the lenses through which to trace the ancient prophetic phenomenon and even the literary nature of Hebrew Bible prophetic literature. As already noted, I think that connections drawn between the literary productions represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the phenomenon of biblical prophecy are problematic and anachronistic. In the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls, then, although we may be able to reach conclusions about the developments of textual transmission and scribal practices over the course of the Second Temple period, we cannot use them to reach conclusions about the phenomenon of biblical prophecy *per se*. Hence, while I concur with Martti that the artifacts should always be taken into consideration, there are similarities and distinctions that do not depend on the artifact, and the comparison of ancient Near Eastern and biblical prophecy *cannot* be restricted by the writing materials.

I turn now to the question of what it *is* possible to compare by addressing Martti's question: "What is the main contribution of ancient Near Eastern sources to the study of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible in general and the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular?" I want to briefly highlight three elements that I do find to be valid points of comparison between Hebrew Bible prophecy (the phenomenon, and its literary products) and ancient Near Eastern prophetic sources: *prophetic activity*, *prophetic message*, and *prophetic writings*. Three general caveats limit this comparison and seem to be agreed on between us: (1) These three elements are represented in very limited ways in ancient Near Eastern sources, and on much broader scales in the Hebrew Bible.⁶³ (2) Neither biblical nor extrabiblical sources "yield a full picture of the prophetic phenomenon in any historical moment";⁶⁴ and (3) Hebrew Bible prophecy, much beyond

62. Nissinen, "Oracles as Artefacts," 62.

63. See above, where Martti recognizes "the fragmentary documentation" of the Near Eastern and Greek prophets, as well as in many others of his above-mentioned studies.

64. Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources," 380.

other ancient Near Eastern sources, is preserved in a prophetic literature that has evolved over a long span of time and suggests multilayered prophetic collections. These caveats give rise to one of our major challenges in the study of this literature, that is, whether and how we can locate early strands within the Hebrew Bible prophetic books.

With those remarks in mind, I fully agree with Martti that every prophetic passage requires a discussion of its literary unity, dating, and more, using form- and redaction-critical methods.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, keeping these caveats in mind, it seems to me that individual prophetic *passages* (thus, not books, and not the artifacts) may be helpfully compared to ancient Near Eastern sources on prophecy in the attempt to reconstruct some aspects of ancient prophecy and prophetic writings within Hebrew Bible prophetic sources.

1. Points of contact in terms of *the prophetic activity*.⁶⁶
 - a. Practices of prophecy and divination. The phenomenon of intuitive (noninductive) prophecy in ancient Near Eastern sources contextualizes Hebrew Bible prophets as participants in this wider arena, making the intuitive audio/visionary venue the only legitimate communication with YHWH (e.g., Deut 18:9–22).⁶⁷
 - b. Sociological contexts (institutions and audiences).⁶⁸ Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, like Mesopotamian prophets, were connected to both royal and temple institutions. In an additional parallel to Mesopotamian prophets, they often come from peripheral rural

65. Nissinen, “Book of Hosea and the Last Days,” 613–27.

66. Nissinen, “What Is Prophecy?,” 53–74. De Jong (*Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 351–56, 358) counts no less than sixteen shared characteristics between Neo-Assyrian prophecy and Isaiah.

67. Changes over time in the phenomenology of the Hebrew Bible may be recognized, e.g., in transformations within the legitimate devices of prophecy, not only from ecstatic to plain hearing the words of God but also in the rejection of dreams as the context of prophecy in Jer 23:25–33; compare to Num 12:6–7 and see below. The bibliography on the nature of Hebrew Bible prophecy (prophetic activity and prophetic writings) is vast, I here mention only David L. Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” in *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen, SymS 13 (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature 2000), 33–44.

68. Compare to Nissinen, “Oracles as Artefacts,” 55–59, 62–63.

settlements (e.g., Teqoa, Moreshet, Anathoth, Gibeon).⁶⁹ But they function in very different ways from their ancient Near Eastern counterparts. Hebrew Bible prophets have a sharp focus on proper performance of cult and on disobedience against God (e.g., Hos 2:4–15; 8:11–14; 9:10–14, 15–17; Amos 4:4–5; Jer 2:4–13, 20–25, 26–28). Hence, although Hebrew Bible prophecy seems to have been performed in connection with royal and temple institutions, it is not geared to supporting them.

- c. Circumstances of prophecy. One shared function of both ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew Bible prophets was to react to/assist in/intervene in times of political-military crises. On such occasions the king would presumably most need the prophet's connection with the divine (see the letters in Mari, the Nineveh oracles, and Isa 7:1–9, among many other Hebrew Bible examples). This phenomenon seems fairly similar in the two corpora.⁷⁰

2. Points of contact concerning *the prophetic message*.

- a. Peace/supportive prophecies. The Nineveh oracles *šulmu* prophecies, with the repeated announcement *la tapallah* promise the continuation of the king's reign and protection from enemies; they refer to contemporary time or the immediate future.⁷¹ This specific genre may be compared with the *אל תירא* prophecies of Isaiah son of Amoz (Isa 7:4–9; 37:6–7), delivered to both Ahaz and Hezekiah in the face of the Syro-Ephraimite and the Assyrian threats respectively. This type of supportive prophecy continues

69. Abraham Malamat observed this peripheral social context to be similar to that of prophets in Mari, see his *Mari and the Bible: Two West-Semitic Cultures* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 123–45, esp. 126; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 15–16.

70. For the Mesopotamian sources, see Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in *Prophetic Divination*, esp. 114–19; Moshe Anbar gathered from the scant data that the *āpilum* could approach the king in Mari directly, see his *Prophecy, Treaty-Making and Tribes in the Mari Documents: During the Period of the Amorite Kings (from the End of the Nineteenth Century BCE until 1760 BCE)* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2007), 38–40. Hebrew Bible examples are plentiful, from the early prophecy (e.g., 1 Kgs 21, 2 Kgs 3) down to the eighth and the sixth century BCE where officials were sent to the prophets; thus, there is no direct approach of the prophet to the king as in Isa 37:1–7, 14–35; Jer 21:1–7; 37:1–10, 17–21; and elsewhere.

71. Martti Nissinen, “Fear Not: A Study on an Ancient Near Eastern Phrase,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 195–232.

into the sixth century BCE, as reflected in Jeremiah's excoriation of the "peace prophets" (see below on Jeremiah and Ezekiel).

- b. Other types of prophetic proclamations. There are a few examples of exhortations and warnings in ancient Near Eastern sources on prophecy.⁷² Nevertheless, this is one of the places that the limited information about ancient Near Eastern intuitive prophecy at our disposal should be brought to bear. The lack of extrabiblical references to the numerous other Hebrew Bible prophetic genres and messages cannot be taken as discrediting the Hebrew Bible evidence or as marking such genres as late scribal elaborations.
3. Points of contact regarding the *writing of prophecy*. Here we need to distinguish between prophetic *writings* per se and the prophetic books. While there is no extrabiblical equivalent to the latter, there are at least three points at which ancient Near Eastern sources may illuminate early stages of Hebrew Bible prophetic writings:
 - a. The connection between oral and written prophecies. Ancient Near Eastern sources on prophecy teach us that prophecies were written down by scribes shortly after their oral proclamation and that the written records are coherent and understandable.⁷³ Based on the horizontal Neo-Assyrian tablets that hold but one prophetic report, Simo Parpola already assumed that the small number of prophetic texts illustrate that the written records of prophecy were not kept for long. This information also validates the assumption that prophecies were regularly recorded in writing.⁷⁴ Hence, the scholarly presumption that the writing down of Hebrew Bible prophecies occurred only long after their oral performances has no valid

72. References to wider contents may be found in prophecies in Mari including demands for social justice, Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 126–28; opposition to the political steps taken by the king, Anbar, *Prophecy*, 54–56; or prophecies against other nations (Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 133–37); see also Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 16–20 (A 1121 [ll. 52–54], A 2731).

73. This observation is based on Mari (Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 129) and on the Nineveh oracles, and it is significant enough to disprove the presumption that original Hebrew Bible prophecies were but gibberish, reflecting the ecstatic mode of prophetic revelation. See above, where Martti mentions, among others, the report on prophecy in Lachish ostrakon 3 in Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 212–15.

74. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, liii–liv; Martti Nissinen, "How Prophecy Became Literature," *SJOT* 19 (2005): 169–72.

basis. Rather, we may assume that prophecies were written down by scribes shortly after they were proclaimed.⁷⁵ This close connection between oral performance and writing allows for immediate, synchronic contacts between prophets and scribes, like that portrayed between Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah (Jer 36).⁷⁶

- b. Reliability and accuracy. As in the case of the Nineveh Neo-Assyrian oracles, the Mari prophecies of about a thousand years earlier witness to only a short span of prophetic activity, mostly over the last five to ten years of Zimri-Lim (1774–1760 BCE). Prophecies were reported to the king in letters, thus were fairly immediately put into writing. It is therefore interesting to note that the letters pay attention to the king's demand to receive a full and accurate report from the messengers, often including other references to the circumstances of the prophetic event. These reports conclude by mentioning that they took small recognizable tokens from the prophet to the king (hair and garment fringe) to vouch for the prophet's authorship and the reliability of the prophecy.⁷⁷ Similarly,

75. Martti argues in favor of a constant recording of prophecies in writing in his above-mentioned paper, 169–72; but compare this to the limited abilities Martti presents above concerning immediate writing of prophecies (p. 112), where he credits Hebrew Bible prophets with only the restricted ability “to scrape together a few words” or “perhaps a single oracle.” I suspect that these references to writing (e.g., Isa 8:1–2; 30:8; Ezek 24:1; 37:15–16) may only refer to inscribing symbolic words for the sake of those specific prophecies. Therefore, I would not count any of those instances as signaling the ability or the interest of prophets or of their contemporary scribes in writing/recording their prophecies. When it comes to Ezekiel, scholars have long suggested that prophecies (long and in prose) were written down by the prophet even prior to the oral proclamation, see Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, JSOTSup 78 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

76. Jeremiah 36:2 tells of writing (and rewriting) a scroll of prophecies “from the time I first spoke to you in the days of Josiah to this day.” Without going into the calculation of the exact years covered by this period, the story's expectation is that the prophet is able to repeat all of his previous proclamations and dictate them to Baruch; just as he will do again with the second scroll in 36:32. On the value of this evidence about prophetic activity and writing, see Joachim Schaper, “On Writing and Reciting in Jeremiah 36,” in *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, ed. Hans M. Barstad and Reinhard G. Kratz, BZAW 388 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 137–47.

77. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 16, 62–65 [ARM 26.233]; Anbar, *Prophecy*, 47–49. Two features within the Nineveh oracles demonstrate the wish to record the

in the Hebrew Bible, the presumption that the prophet mediates the words of God accurately is illustrated in the imagery of the prophet as the mouthpiece of his/her god (and see Deut 18:18; Jer 1:7–9; Ezek 2:8–3:3; and more), and this presumption of accuracy is repeated concerning reports of prophecy in writing (Jer 36:4, 6, 17–18, 27, 32).⁷⁸

- c. Prophetic collections. The turn from a report on a single oracle to the collection of prophecies is seen in three such collections of Nineveh oracles. The collections show a basic level of scribal activity. But do they actually show elaborative, interpretive reformulations, which are presumed to characterize such collections? While scholars often point to these as examples of such activity, I do not find any clear evidence of such practices. Rather, these short collections show oracles set one after the other (presumably in chronological order, given the lack of indications for other ordering principles), with minimal (if any) discernable scribal interventions.

This limited Neo-Assyrian information on compiling prophecies shows the greatest difference between ancient Near Eastern prophetic sources and the well-structured, often long and diverse compilations of Hebrew Bible prophecies. For Martti, this is reason enough to classify Hebrew Bible prophecy as “*literary prophecy*, that is, part of a literary work not based on any real-life performance,” but on the much later “imagination” of earlier prophetic activity. I want to suggest, in contrast, that the Neo-Assyrian collections may, in fact, provide a helpful analogy to how the earliest writ-

prophetic words as accurately as possible: (1) In collections 1 and 2, the concluding formula at the close of each prophecy is: “by the mouth of PN of GN” (collection 3 is presumed to include prophecies of a single prophet, La-dagil-ili). (2) In several tablets the prophetic words are introduced by the particle *mā*, which commonly designates quotation of direct speech (e.g., Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, nos. 6–8, 10–11; Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, nos. 91–93, 95–96).

78. Compare to Kratz, *Prophets of Israel*, 15–17, 27–28. Kratz assumes an inherent difference between the oral prophecies and the scribal written reports that are “prophecies in their own words” in which “the wording probably changed” (15), and more harshly for the Hebrew Bible: “Nowhere is the voice of the prophet preserved in its original wording” (27). While I do not argue for *ipsissima verba*, those categorical sentences seem not to work with the above ancient data and their perspectives on the roles of scribes in recording prophecy.

ten Hebrew collections came into being. While I agree that scribal activity shaped the literary prophetic books, why does the beginning of prophetic compilations need to be seen as a much later process?

Therefore, in answer to Martti's question on what should be compared and "what is the main contribution of ancient Near Eastern sources to the study of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible?" I suggest that, notwithstanding the cultural and material differences between the extant evidence of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, we may find helpful analogies in the phenomenology of prophetic activity and the early evolution of prophetic compilations.⁷⁹ As minimal as the evidence of these extrabiblical sources may be, I would argue that they provide some keys to the practices of *ancient Hebrew prophecy*.

4.2.3. The Problem of Dating the Prophetic Books

Martti's question about dating focuses on the prophetic books and on scribal activity. In fact, the question of dating and literary development is behind Martti's larger question to me: "Are there reasons to prioritize the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and their time in the historical reconstruction?" Our divergent answers point to fundamental differences between us on the question of orality and writing, which have already been delineated to a certain extent in the previous section.

Martti suggests a fundamental difference between ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew Bible prophecy. While the former can "often be dated rather precisely," Hebrew Bible prophetic literature is "a canonized composition of texts of different age as the result of a centuries-long editorial process."⁸⁰ For ancient Near Eastern prophetic documents, the gap between oral performance and the prophetic documents is presumed to be a matter of "a

79. See the valuable distinctions Martti presented between *biblical prophecy* and *ancient Hebrew prophecy* in Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources," 389; Nissinen, "What Is Prophecy?," 53–73. Or see Armin Lange, who distinguishes between "written prophecy" (i.e., written records of orally delivered prophetic messages) and "literary prophecy" (i.e., literature that reinterprets and recontextualizes earlier written records of prophecy) in his "Literary Prophecy and Oracle Collection: A Comparison between Judah and Greece in Persian Times," in *Prophets, Prophecy and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak, LHBOTS 427 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 248–75; see also Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources," 395.

80. Nissinen, "Comparing Prophetic Sources," 381, 383.

few days to a decade”; whereas for the Hebrew Bible prophetic texts, “we have to reckon with centuries.”⁸¹ Martti recognizes that biblical prophecy “includes a fair amount of text material that is older,” but the process of transmission, and the lack of criteria by which to identify early prophetic materials, leads him to conclude that the process of compiling collections of prophecies into books has created an unbridgeable “distance between the spoken and the written word, which cannot be presumed to be identical. The so-called *ipsissima verba* remain unreachable.”⁸²

Toward the end of “Pesharim as Divination” (originally published in 2009), Martti suggests his understanding of the “transition from oral and, eventually, written prophecy to literary prophecy.”⁸³ The transition, which he also terms “scribal prophecy,” contains a development “in the concept of a prophet from a speaker to a scribe,” who is now a scholar who interprets the prophet’s words that are at that stage written texts.⁸⁴ Whereas the traditional prophet served as an oral mediator of the divine word, enjoying a revelatory divination, the scribe appears as a “mediator of the divine knowledge,” and the divination now transforms into “scribal divination.”⁸⁵ In “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” Martti contextualizes the early stages of this “fundamental change in the concept, practice and social context of prophecy” as the collapse of the kingdom of Judah, from 598 until the mid-fifth century BCE.⁸⁶ Hence, according to Martti, the transformation in prophecy takes place through the scribal activity that produces literary prophecy, much later than the actual prophetic activity.⁸⁷ Finally, when “tracing literalization of prophecy” in “How Prophecy Became Literature,”

81. Nissinen, “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 383.

82. Nissinen, “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 384.

83. Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination,” 669.

84. Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination,” 678.

85. Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination,” 678–79. This is another example of how Martti’s paradigm that explains the pesharim literature is retrojected back to the prophetic books: “This is how we are supposed to envision the role of the biblical prophets as described by the authors of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible” (679).

86. Nissinen, “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 394.

87. Martti locates “two parallel developments presupposing each other”: (1) “the decline and marginalization (but not disappearance) of the traditional type of prophecy as oral delivery of divine messages”; and (2) “the rise of literary interpretation of written prophecies which becomes the preferred and authoritative sort of divination in the Second Temple community” (Nissinen, “Comparing Prophetic Sources,” 394). This paradigm does not go any further than the paradigms suggested already by Julius

Martti proposes that the prophetic books were first written and formalized by scribes from the early Persian period onward, in Jerusalem and possibly in other Jewish communities, “meant to be read and studied.”⁸⁸ This study in turn produced further interpretation, elaboration, and so on.

As Martti observed and as I concur, a diachronic framework is definitely essential in the study of prophecy and prophetic literature. We part ways on the question of where we each mark the beginning points of writing and subsequent literary evolution, transmission and reception and where we signal the end of this literary evolution. As noted, Martti locates this beginning point quite late, in the early Persian period.

In my studies on Jeremiah and Ezekiel, I have argued that the diachronic literary processes for both Jeremiah and Ezekiel start very early, that the writing down of prophecy occurs close to, or immediately after, the presumably oral prophetic performance. That means that prophetic proclamations start their written journey quite early, first as short prophetic compilations (e.g., Jer 14:1–15:4; 21:11–23:8; 23:9–40; here the ancient Near Eastern collections provide a model for such a process). These smaller compilations then come together as growing collections, designated by William McKane as a “rolling corpus” (a process others would term *Fortschreibung*; e.g., Jer 3). Therefore, the core of a prophetic book could be stabilized fairly close to the prophet’s era, as in the case of the book of Ezekiel,⁸⁹ or several generations thereafter, as in the case of the book of Jeremiah, which I would place still within the sixth century, with minor elaborations by the early Persian period.⁹⁰ These two prophets and

Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Black, 1994), 392–404.

88. Nissinen, “How Prophecy Became Literature,” 157–59, quotation p. 159.

89. For this early dating of Ezekiel, see Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 3–17, and even Walther Zimmerli considered this for major parts of the book (*Ezekiel*, trans. J. D. Martin, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 1:9–16, 68–73).

90. In dating the book of Jeremiah still within the sixth century, I join Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 117; Alexander Rofé, “Studies on the Composition of the Book of Jeremiah” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 44 (1974–1975): 1–29; Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, BZAW 176 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 222–35, 293–96; Mark Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform and Jeremiah’s Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response*, HBM 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006); Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26–45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–24.

their books mark a transformation in prophetic activity and in prophetic scribal culture at the end of the seventh–early sixth centuries BCE.

As indicated above, the study of the prophetic books as literature needs to be carried out separately from the study of prophetic activity and prophetic writing. Thus, the problem of dating requires the development of clear criteria for distinguishing stages of development within each prophetic collection; on this point, I think, all scholars agree. The problem, as I see it, is that as I have worked through Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular, the criteria that inform scholarly work on these books seem increasingly untenable.

Many of the scholarly paradigms that continue to influence our work go back to the nineteenth century, to the influential studies of Heinrich Ewald, Abraham Kuenen, Julius Wellhausen, and their students.⁹¹ This scholarship distinguished “visionary prophets” from “prophetic writers.” The former proclaim prophecy orally; they are creative, charismatic, spiritual, free, or antiinstitutional. The latter are institutional spokespeople and legal interpreters, epigonists or imitators of the earlier prophetic style. Jeremiah is considered the height of the prophetic speakers; Ezekiel is an epigone. Thus, scribal activity in general is categorized as part of the later, imitative stage. These initial distinctions were clearly informed by an anti-Judaic bias against legalism as derivative and spiritually void.⁹²

Let me emphasize that I would never accuse any of my colleagues of harboring such regrettable perspectives, but I do wonder why these distinctions need to continue to guide our studies of prophets and prophetic literature. To put it differently, setting aside those historical scholarly premises, is there any real substance to supposed distinctions between prophetic speakers and prophetic writers (and scribes)?

Among the criteria that have guided the study of Jeremiah and seem unsatisfactory is the distinction between poetry and prose, which seems related to the supposed distinction between charismatic spoken activity and scribal Torah-related (Deuteronomic, DtrJ) activity.⁹³ Indeed, the

91. See Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature,” 566–73, and already, Rom-Shiloni, “Forest and Trees.”

92. The retrojection back from the first century CE to the biblical prophets was explicitly expressed, for instance, by Robert H. Kennett, “Ezekiel,” in *Old Testament Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 42–58, esp. 58.

93. The long list of scholars adhering to this distinction is well known. For recent challenges to the prose style in Jeremiah as a DtrJ layer, coming from the sociolinguis-

book of Jeremiah shows a great diversity of styles and literary genres (poetic proclamations, prose sermons, individual laments, wisdom sayings, historiographical writings, biographical prophetic stories, and possibly more), as well as a remarkable intertextual fabric of echoes and allusions to literary and legal pentateuchal traditions (clearly not restricted to Deuteronomy) that involves both poetry and prose passages. Yet scholars still connect the basic distinction between poetry and prose to the divide between earlier and later passages.⁹⁴

The book of Jeremiah is indeed a compilation. It holds original prophecies (i.e., prophecies without later scribal/editorial elaboration) as well as passages that evolved over time under subsequent groups of tradents. But I think we need to seriously reevaluate our criteria for distinguishing layers of compilation and redaction. As noted, some standard tools are inaccurate and inadequate, founded on faulty premises—so what can we use instead? Philological tools may help sort out additions, elaborations, interpretations, and so on. Such studies of minutiae may help reveal literary phases in the growth of a rolling corpus.⁹⁵ But how then do we decipher the contexts and relative order?⁹⁶ How do we expose the thematic motivations behind such additions, elaborations, and adaptations? The example of the motif of “evil from the North” (see Martti’s discussion above) is a good instance of the need to revisit our criteria. In this case (I have argued), unsound scholarly presumptions about the theology

tic methodology, see Frank Polak, “Language Variation in the Book of Jeremiah and Its Cultural and Social Background,” in *Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, ed. Louis Stulman and Edward Silverman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–20.

94. Exceptional in his treatment of DtrJ and specifically the poetry in Jeremiah is Hermann-Josef Stipp, “‘But into the Water You Must Not Dip It’ (Jeremiah 13:1): Methodological Reflections on How to Identify the Work of Deuteronomistic Redaction in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, BZAW 461 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 167–95.

95. William McKane, *Jeremiah I–XXV*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), l–lxxxiii.

96. One of the very interesting examples of such a “rolling corpus” in Jeremiah is the five passages (3:6–11, 12–13, 14–18, 19–25; 4:1–2) that, each on its own terms, refer back to Jer 3:1–5, which sets an impossible theological challenge to the covenant relationship between God and the people. See Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “The Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah: On the Employment of Marital and Political Metaphors,” in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*, ed. Richard Baultch and Gary Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 153–74, esp. 163–69.

underlying the biblical materials caused fundamental errors in the ordering of these prophetic passages.⁹⁷

It seems to me that scholars on all sides of the question (and see Martti's comments above) are recognizing the inadequacy of some of our classic criteria and methods for explaining the literary history and evolution of prophetic books. For me, the next helpful stage of the conversation would be to reexamine together these methods and criteria for the presumptions behind them and reevaluate their appropriateness for the prophetic corpus. I also suggest that we revisit the literary and philological features of these books as clues to the compositional and later editorial processes.

In "Prophets in Jeremiah in Struggle over Leadership, or Rather over Prophetic Authority?," I made a very different suggestion to explain the growth of Hebrew Bible prophetic literature, highlighting the pivotal place of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Two particular phenomena in these prophetic books place them at a transformative point in the history of prophetic activity and prophetic writing.

1. *The intertextual (echo and allusion) nature of prophetic passages in both poetry and prose within those two books.* Among the unique features of the book of Jeremiah and, separately and independently, the book of Ezekiel,⁹⁸ are (1) the constant references to pentateuchal traditions (that is, literary and legal traditions from diverse pentateuchal sources, especially the Holiness Code, Priestly Document, and Deuteronomium); (2) the regular use of other literary biblical compositional forms (e.g., psalm-odic poetry, wisdom phrases); and (3) the invocation of earlier prophetic traditions (Ezekiel adds an acquaintance with Mesopotamian-Babylonian sources).⁹⁹ Moreover, these references and allusions to other literary materials represent a phenomenon that cannot be confined to any single layer in either of these books. This recognition led me to suggest that as early as

97. See Rom-Shiloni, "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature," 577–83.

98. Another feature that characterizes the two books is the use of quotations in each. Jeremiah presents over 140 such quotations of other voices, mostly anonymous; there are over 40 quotations in Ezekiel. These numbers are much higher in comparison with other prophetic books prior to or later than them. This rhetoric that integrates other voices for the sake of polemics is a significant indication of the public role of the two prophets. See Rom-Shiloni, *Voices from the Ruins*, 77–82, 110–20.

99. See Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel among the Exiles," where I tried to include all references to the Babylonian context of Ezekiel (the prophet and the book) and the relevance of this context to the prophetic message addressed to the Babylonian Judean exiles. See Nissinen, "(How) Does the Book of Ezekiel Reveal Its Babylonian Context?"

the late seventh century, probably with the growth of a corpus of authoritative pentateuchal traditions (and possibly other literary compositions), the practice of prophecy began to be transformed. Jeremiah vehemently rejects relying on intuitive divination based on visions and dreams (Jer 23:25–32) and emphasizes YHWH's "true word" (דְּבַרִּי אֱמֶת, 23:28–29). Although the source of authority for those true divine words is not explicitly specified, the abundance of references to oral/written pentateuchal traditions in Jeremiah (and in Ezekiel) suggests that these traditions provide such sources. In many cases, the prophets used such literary allusions to structure both judgment prophecies and prophecies of consolation. This phenomenon starts in the earliest layers of the book of Jeremiah and continues in Ezekiel and the Persian-period prophets.¹⁰⁰ Thus, features that scholars have identified as late and derivative are part and parcel of the prophetic activity, creativity, and proclamation and were adapted by followers of the prophets who became their tradents.¹⁰¹

2. The struggle between prophetic circles in the last decades of the seventh century captures a fairly significant place in Jeremiah (less so in Ezekiel). The interesting point in this struggle is that the illegitimate "peace prophets," whom Jeremiah castigates, draw on the supportive prophecies of Isaiah son of Amoz (see above) and appear to carry on the practices and presumptions of *ancient Hebrew prophecy*, whereas Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ezek 13) illustrate a significant change. Jeremiah denounces the "peace prophets" and rejects their status and message (e.g., Jer 23:9–40).

In the light of ancient Near Eastern sources on prophecy and what could be (carefully) learned about Hebrew Bible prophecy, I suggest, then that we can mark a broad trajectory of developments: (1) The first dramatic transformation, in the mid-eighth century, occurred in the face of the Assyrian crisis; in Israel and in Judah prophecies began to be recorded and compiled into broader collections. This crisis, which eventually culminated in the destruction of Israel, broadened the target audience of

100. Allusions to pentateuchal traditions also characterize prophecies in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. See Rex A. Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Risto Nurmela, *Prophets in Dialogue: Inner-biblical Allusions in Zechariah 1–8 and 9–14* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 1996), 1–37; Michael R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8*, LHBOTS 506 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 1–15; and Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "What Is 'Persian,'" 41–51.

101. Rom-Shiloni, "Prophets in Jeremiah," 369–71.

prophets to include the general public (see, e.g., Amos 4 and the concept of covenant aimed at the people as individuals). (2) By the end of the seventh to the early sixth century, struggles over authority between Jeremiah and then Ezekiel and “peace prophets” caused a sharp break in prophetic activity and writings. The growing familiarity with pentateuchal traditions supplied new sources of authority to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Thus, the adaptation of pentateuchal traditions started at this point as an element of prophetic creativity. The Destruction politically divided Judean Jews, and Jeremiah and Ezekiel became de facto spokespersons for and to each of their different communities. They continued to serve in intermediary roles on behalf the Judean and Babylonian communities (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

From the late eighth century onward, scribes acted alongside prophets. Scribes recorded prophecies as accurately as they could and in cooperation with the prophetic figures during their years of prophetic activity. The need to update, adapt, and actualize prophecies for subsequent events has been there from the very beginning. It could have been done by the prophets themselves, just as it could have been further elaborated by tradents and followers of the prophets, as of the late eighth, seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries (e.g., passages within Isa 7–8). *Fortschreibung* is not a marker of late scribal activity, and it does not designate the substitution of scribal divination for revelatory divination. Hebrew Bible prophecy seems to work for the ad hoc needs of the king and the people at the same time as it aims toward the future (Jer 32:6–15; Ezek 12:21–28; 24:24; 33:30–33; etc.).

In closing, a comparative perspective may serve as a guide to contextualize prophetic passages in their historical milieu. Prophetic passages, and even reports on prophetic events, must be investigated first as potentially contextualizable in their time.¹⁰² Elaborations, adaptations, and other features of *Fortschreibung* may take us to the interpretive activity of subsequent generations, but some such elaborations may also illustrate early traits of reception that start with the prophets themselves.¹⁰³ The trick will be distinguishing them from one another.

102. This was a methodological premise Yair Hoffman formulated in his commentary on Jeremiah as a point of departure after which he did not hesitate to designate many passages in Jeremiah as non-Jeremian; he came very close to Mowinckel in his overall approach to Jeremiah. See Yair Hoffman, *Jeremiah 1–25* [Hebrew], Mikra LeYisrael (Tel Aviv: Am Oved; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 29.

103. One such example for a *Fortschreibung* that could have been added by the prophet himself may be found in Ezek 24, see Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “Two Prophecies in

I am deeply grateful to Martti for his challenging questions and look forward to the next part of our venture, that is, establishing some common ground of criteria that may lead us closer to “a historically reliable picture of prophecy in the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.”

4.3. Martti Nissinen and Dalit Rom-Shiloni: Meeting the Challenge

In the previous part of this conversation essay, Dalit gives a response to Martti's critical questions concerning the methodological challenges in the historical study of prophecy and the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible. The key issues are related to the dating of the texts beyond the extant manuscript evidence, the reliability of the historical reconstruction of the prophets and their time, and the contribution of Near Eastern evidence of the prophetic phenomenon. While there are crucial points of disagreement between us that we have not shied away from, it is also clear that our arguments are theoretically based on common ground that can well be characterized as *historical-critical*, with an emphasis on both parts of the compound expression.¹⁰⁴ It is this common ground that enables our conversation, the purpose of which is not to reach full agreement but, rather, to manage the disagreement in a way that motivates mutual learning and helps raise new questions.

We share the full appreciation of the literary processes that have caused the texts' transformations in the course of their transmission. We also agree about the necessity of a diachronic intertextual framework for the historical study of the prophetic books, however difficult it may be to reach definitive conclusions. We consider it important to make a distinction between prophetic activity and prophetic literature, sharing the conviction that biblical prophetic literature grows out of a real phenomenon that was not fundamentally different from Near Eastern prophecy. We both appreciate the ancient Near Eastern documentation of the prophetic phenomenon as providing sociohistorical context and helpful analogies

Ezekiel (14:1–11; 24:6–8) and One Source Text (Leviticus 17): Notes on Intertextuality and Creative Interactions,” in *Historical Settings, Intertextuality, and Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Marvin A. Sweeney*, ed. Hyun Chul Paul Kim, Tyler D. Mayfield, and Hye Kyung Park, FAT 160 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 195–212.

104. See Martti's deliberations on historical criticism and critical historicism in “Reflections on the ‘Historical-Critical’ Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism,” in *Prophetic Divination*, 29–52.

regarding prophetic activity, the content and function of prophetic oracles, and the social conditions of prophesying including the occasional writing down of prophetic messages.

Our common ground is the heritage of our academic backgrounds in Jerusalem and Helsinki, which, the traditional controversies notwithstanding,¹⁰⁵ can be seen as branches of the same tree when it comes to the historical-critical emphasis in biblical research and teaching. However, despite our general agreement regarding the nature of our sources, we time and again arrive at interpreting them differently, especially when it comes to their relation to historical events and circumstances. Neither of us denies the possibility of using the biblical prophetic books as historical sources, but we often seem to disagree on the extent to which they give us access to the historical reality of the prophetic phenomenon in Israel, Judah, Babylonia, and Yehud, and of the persons and events mentioned in the prophetic books. At the heart of the debate are the criteria for making historical statements concerning the time preceding the oldest available manuscript material. The issue is not only what happened in the seventh or sixth century BCE but, quite as importantly, what happened to the prophetic phenomenon and the prophetic texts between the sixth and first centuries BCE, that is, between the historical settings of Jeremiah or Ezekiel, the evolution of their books, and the age of the oldest available manuscripts. Answering these questions is notoriously, even embarrassingly, difficult in the absence of manuscript evidence. According to Martti, the criteria can only be based on the evidence that actually exists materially, and what we have at our disposal are early Jewish texts (especially the Dead Sea Scrolls) and ancient Near Eastern texts. Dalit is keener to search for valid literary and theological criteria (that is, to reconsider criteria already in use) that could guide us to enter the unknown phase of the literary growth of prophetic literature. We do both recognize that unfortunately the material evidence at hand

105. See Dalit's discussion in "From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature," 566–73; for the roots of the controversies between the German Protestant and Israeli Jewish scholarship, see Ali Elrefa'ei, *Wellhausen and Kaufmann: Ancient Israel and Its Religious History in the Works of Julius Wellhausen and Yehezkel Kaufmann*, BZAW 490 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016). Martti, of course, is a Finnish Lutheran rather than a German Protestant, which actually makes a difference, but it is also true that most biblical scholars in Helsinki, including him and his teachers, have been thoroughly inspired by German scholarship.

does not really cover the crucial centuries in the second half of the first millennium BCE.

It is our shared conviction that the Near Eastern texts documenting prophetic divination,¹⁰⁶ especially the eighteenth-century BCE texts from Mari and those from the seventh-century BCE archives of Nineveh, are crucial for understanding prophecy as a common Near Eastern phenomenon. Thanks to the much-increased amount of Near Eastern documentation of prophecy, we are in a better position than ever before to contextualize ancient Israelite/Judahite/Yehudite prophets and prophecy in their historical milieus. Comparative research has revealed so many patterns of prophetic activity, the language and contents of prophetic messages, and their developing into written form that it has become impossible to separate the prophetic phenomenon in the southern Levant from its Near Eastern environment. While the texts from Mari and Assyria cannot be used as direct evidence of anything that took place in Judah and Israel, the presence of related patterns in the Hebrew Bible can be taken as evidence of the knowledge of the biblical authors of prophetic activity that was a phenomenological concomitant of a larger phenomenon in other parts of the Near East.

The search for the *historical* setting of biblical prophecy in the vicinity of the Near Eastern prophetic phenomenon is not just a matter of listing superficial similarities. Research has shown that all essential socioreligious aspects of prophetic divination present in the Near Eastern texts are shared by biblical prophecy, the preliterate stages of which may not have differed drastically from what we know of the sources from Mesopotamia and the Levant. What makes biblical prophecy a special case, however, is that these features are embedded in a completely different *literary and compositional* setting. The crucial question concerns the date and agents of the scribal work that created this setting: how, when, and by whom did the textualization of prophetic performances and the transformation of prophecy into literature take place?

It is clear that the practices of interpretation, rewriting, and editorial work do not intrinsically imply specific datings, and *Fortschreibung* is not a synonym for *late*.¹⁰⁷ These practices cannot be totally separated from the

106. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*.

107. In the language of biblical studies, *late* tends to be the equivalent of postexilic or Persian-Hellenistic, even though Martti would argue that the Persian period should no longer be considered late.

prophets that once performed on the historical scene, since, as Dalit points out, the need for actualization and interpretation was there from early on. The Bible is not the only text where prophets and scribes communicate, and even Martti's skepticism about prophets themselves having written anything by themselves cannot be granted *a priori* but must be argued for. While Martti's argument here leans heavily on the absence of ancient Near Eastern/eastern Mediterranean evidence,¹⁰⁸ Dalit points out the limited information we have within those extrabiblical sources concerning different aspects of prophetic activity, including processes of recording and transmitting it in writing. Limited as well is the biblical information concerning the prophets' involvement in any writing,¹⁰⁹ and unique is the description of Jeremiah dictating his words to a scribe (Jer 36). But those limitations of information should not serve as evidence of silence for either line of argumentation. Both of us take it as a distinct possibility that the chain of literary transmission leading to the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as we know them began with historical prophets, whether or not they wrote a single oracle themselves or were involved in collecting and writing down their own prophetic proclamations.

To what extent the text of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophetic books in the available textual witnesses can be derived from the earliest phases of transmission is another question to which we give divergent answers, Dalit being much readier than Martti to attribute the lion's share of the text of the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to the prophets and their immediate circles. The divergent answers are to be expected because the arguments can only be based on text-internal observations. The degree of probability of our interpretations depends on how we are able to manage the inner-biblical, diachronic intertextual framework within which we interpret our observations. Dalit has done extensive research on innerbiblical interpretation in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, revealing the use of pentateuchal material in both books.¹¹⁰ Excited about her findings, Martti keeps asking questions concerning the relative dating of the texts and the agents involved in this intellectual and scribal work. As "we can hardly reconstruct the state of the materials known by the prophet or his followers/tradents," as Dalit aptly concedes,¹¹¹ we will always have to cope with the question of who

108. Nissinen, "Since When Do Prophets Write?," 517–37.

109. Nissinen, "Since When Do Prophets Write?," 524–35.

110. See above.

111. Rom-Shiloni, "Forest and the Trees," 67.

interprets whom when two biblical texts are related to each other. Thus, when Dalit concludes that “both D and P/HL materials (in various stages of orality and textuality, and diverse in extent) were at hand both for the two prophetic personae [scil. Jeremiah and Ezekiel] and for their immediate or early followers/tradents; that is, by the end of the seventh and early sixth centuries BCE,”¹¹² Martti asks why we should stop at the prophets’ immediate or early followers, and what enables the absolute dating of certain literary characteristics on which her assumption is based. The issue, hence, is not whether the presence of pentateuchal traditions in Jeremiah and Ezekiel is real but rather how many scribal generations it took to have all of them recorded in the evolving prophetic books, how the dense inter-textual network between the texts came about, and how much of it derives from sources that are no longer at our disposal. Dalit would ask why such prophetic references to pentateuchal traditions should be delayed only to later scribal generations and could not be taken as part of the genuine prophetic activity of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Both of us read the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as evidence of the transformation of prophetic activity and prophetic scribal culture that took place from the late seventh century BCE onward. This transformation is closely connected with the relationship of oral and written forms of prophetic performance that Dalit discusses critically, dismantling the sharp distinction between prophetic speakers and prophetic writers, and arguing that scribes acted alongside prophets. Martti agrees with Dalit’s statement that “scribes recorded prophecies in the most accurate ways they could and in cooperation with the prophetic figures during their years of prophetic activity.” Even the ancient Near Eastern evidence points in this direction. But if prophets, as a rule, did not write, the distinction between prophetic speakers and writers *is* appropriate; Baruch, after all, is not Jeremiah. In the course of textual transmission, the prophetic texts were copied, edited, and interpreted by scribes who did not prophesy in the traditional oral manner and who could not communicate with the prophets anymore when the transmission was prolonged over generations.

While the distinction between speakers and writers, hence, is a simple reality, Martti is convinced that it should not be equated with the dichotomy of revelatory and scribal divination, assuming that only the prophetic

112. Rom-Shiloni, “Forest and the Trees,” 86; D denotes Deuteronomy and P/HL stands for the Priestly source and the Holiness Code.

speakers can be associated with revelation while the scribes' work is non-revelatory activity. The book of Ezekiel is a prime witness to the idea of the revelatory nature of writing, marking the transformation of prophecy from predominantly oral performance to mediation through writing.¹¹³ Martti further argues that the scribes who worked on the prophetic texts in the Second Temple period assumed the prophetic role for themselves and considered their own practice as transmission of divine knowledge. The marginalization of the traditional type of oral prophecy in favor of the scholarly type of divination and the scribalization of prophecy coincided with the eclipse of Mesopotamian (oral) prophecy and the Late Babylonian scribes' self-understanding as transmitters of divine knowledge and adopting the identity of antediluvian sages like Adapa. In Seth Sanders's words, "scribal culture was more than just the production and interpretation of texts. Writing was intertwined with the scribes' sense of who they could be and what they could know."¹¹⁴ Therefore, the scribes involved in the transmission of prophetic texts should not be regarded as epigones of real prophets but as diviners who used the medium of writing for mediation of continuing revelation. Dalit would rather maintain the difference between prophets and scribes and leave the scribes mostly the technical work of writing down and transmitting the prophetic words along with or beside the prophets without the aspiration of continuing revelation. The late elaborative additions are indeed scribal work that kidnaps the prophet for different ideologies. This is what happens, for instance, in Jer 24 and other passages where the Babylonian exilic ideology comes close to Ezekiel in its phrasing and ideology (e.g., Jer 32:36–41).¹¹⁵

Continuity is a fundamental principle of the development of the tradition whose result we call biblical because of the Bible(s), whether Jewish or Christian. It took a very long time, however, until continuity was associated with immutability; in fact, scribal divination appears as creative interpretation of the increasingly authoritative text, as can be seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Dalit wonders "why the Dead Sea Scrolls should be the lenses through which to trace the ancient prophetic phenomenon and

113. See also Seth L. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*, TSAJ 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 103–27.

114. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch*, 25.

115. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "The Prophecy for 'Everlasting Covenant' (Jeremiah 32:36–41): An Exilic Addition or a Deuteronomistic Redaction?" *VT* 53 (2003): 201–23.

even the literary nature of Hebrew Bible prophetic literature,” finding the connections drawn between the literary productions represented by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the phenomenon of biblical prophecy problematic and anachronistic. Martti would reply that the Dead Sea Scrolls may not be the best conceivable lenses, they just happen to be the oldest available corpus of manuscripts that indisputably demonstrates both the growing authority of the prophetic books and the creativity in their interpretation. Looking through the lenses of the Dead Sea Scrolls should not mean projecting their interpretative practices to the time beyond the extant evidence; in this regard, Dalit’s warnings of anachronism are appropriate. More importantly, the Dead Sea Scrolls testify at the same time to the fluidity of textual transmission and the attempt to ossify the authoritative text in a set (pre-Masoretic) form. They indicate that the text of the biblical prophetic books had not reached a final form but was still developing, and different versions were used simultaneously, as the shorter and longer versions of the book of Jeremiah famously show.

The simultaneous presence of fluidity and stability of textual transmission as evidenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls testifies to the reality of both continuity and transformation. This raises questions concerning the dynamics of stability and change. Representing more or less advanced stages of textual development of each book, the Dead Sea Scrolls bear witness to a gradual stabilization of the Hebrew text. At the same time, together with other textual witnesses, the Dead Sea Scrolls testify to a process of transmission that makes it impossible to read the Masoretic Hebrew text as identical to the text of any book that existed in the seventh or sixth century BCE. Hence, the Dead Sea Scrolls warn against imagining the textual history of the Hebrew Bible as a unilinear development eventually leading to the Masoretic Text as the final form of any book or composition in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹⁶ The textual plurality is not likely to have begun with the Dead Sea Scrolls, which makes the inevitable question of what happened to the prophetic books before the date of the documented evidence very difficult to answer. In the case of some books (e.g., the Pentateuch and Isaiah) the Hebrew text was evidently stabilized earlier than in the case of others (e.g., Jeremiah, Samuel, and Kings), which

116. See Mäkipelto, “Integrative Approach to Textual History”; Mika S. Pajunen, “Textual Plurality of Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Theories of Textual Transmission,” *BN* 186 (2020): 7–28; Eva Mroczek, “The Hegemony of the Biblical in the Study of Second Temple Literature,” *JAJ* 6 (2015): 6–17.

challenges the often-implied idea that the biblical books first reached a stabilized form (the emergence of which is analyzed by *Literarkritik*) that began to change only in the subsequent manuscript tradition (i.e., the realm of textual criticism).¹¹⁷

Obviously, the Dead Sea Scrolls do not present season two of a once-finished production. They do demonstrate how scribal interpretation gave birth to entirely new genres, such as the pesharim and rewritten biblical books. New genres (e.g., the prophetic novella in Jonah and the beginnings of apocalyptic writing) start emerging already in the Hebrew Bible as the result of the scribal interpretation of the increasingly authoritative tradition. The biblical and the parabiblical, therefore, should be seen in a continuum in which reception history cannot be separated from textual history. Nevertheless, continuity cannot obscure further transformations within scribal interpretation found in Second Temple literature. Dalit calls attention to the significant differences between inner-biblical exegesis and subsequent biblical interpretation in general, and particularly in reference to prophetic literature within Second Temple Literature.

All the questions we have discussed above boil down to the one of what happened to prophetic texts between the seventh/sixth and first centuries BCE and of how this problem could be managed in a methodologically sound manner. For some colleagues, the nature of the sources may make such a historical question altogether inept, as the debate concerning the limits and even the justification of historical criticism elsewhere in this book demonstrates.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, even an outspoken critic of the historical-critical approach may say that “neither the recognition that at present we do not have dated manuscripts for versions like some ancient Near Eastern literature nor the recognition that our assumptions need assessment imply an abandonment of history. They imply we need better tools.”¹¹⁹

Our short conversation has focused on finding the most relevant questions rather than describing or even envisioning what kind of tools should be developed for the purposes of the historical study of prophets and prophecy. To start with, Martti might suggest that we pay more attention to the material reality as the medium of prophecy, understand-

117. See the discussion between Anneli Aejmelaeus and Juha Pakkala in this volume; cf. Lange, “Jeremiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls.”

118. See the discussion between Cynthia Edenburg, Francis Borchardt, Jason M. Silverman, and Juha Pakkala in this volume.

119. See Jason Silverman above, page 61.

ing the text both as verbal content and as material artifact.¹²⁰ Even when it comes to the historical study of prophets and prophecy, we cannot change our sources. Instead, we can study what changes *in* the sources, interpret those changes to the best of our ability, admitting the limits of our present methods. If at all possible, we should constantly develop our tools to find out what kind of secondary reconstructions of the past are enabled by the primary reconstructions of the past.¹²¹ The secondary reconstructions are to be found in the available set of sources including the entire textual evidence of the prophetic books with the ancient versions, text-internal study of which remains inevitable. The text-internal study must be combined with comparative analysis of the ancient Near Eastern/eastern Mediterranean documentation of the prophetic phenomenon, as well as the post/non/parabiblical writings of late Second Temple Judaism, which serve as important documents of scribal practices and creativity, though well defined as different from the prophetic biblical literature.

Dalit, for her part, might call to reconfigure literary and theological/ideological, as well as linguistic, criteria by which literary layers in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel could be deciphered. There are some clearly nonvalid distinctions that need to be taken off this list, for example, the style distinction of poetry vs. prose, the Deuteronomistic style and themes as a tool to differentiate redactional/non-Jeremian layers in Jeremiah, and the premise that theological perspectives are secondary additions to prophecy. In addition, the intertextual references to pentateuchal materials and to other biblical compositions should not be automatically connected to

120. See Martti's article "Oracles as Artefacts." For recent works on the significance of the material evidence, see David M. Carr, "Rethinking the Materiality of Biblical Texts: From Source, Tradition, and Redaction to a Scroll Approach," *ZAW* 132 (2020): 594–621; Mika S. Pajunen, "Reading Psalm and Prayer Manuscripts from Qumran," in *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures: Materiality, Presence, and Performance*, ed. Anna Krauß, Jonas Leipziger, and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut, *Materiale Textkulturen* 26 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 55–70; James Nati, "The Rolling Corpus: Materiality and Pluriformity at Qumran, with Special Consideration of the *Serekh ha-Yahad*," *DSD* 27 (2020): 161–201; Drew Longacre, "Scribal Approaches to Damaged Manuscripts," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Study of Humanities: Method, Theory, Meaning (Proceedings of the Eighth Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Munich, 4–7 August, 2013)*, ed. Pieter B. Hartog, Alison Schofield, and Samuel I. Thomas, *STDJ* 125 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 141–64.

121. See Nissinen, "Reflections on the 'Historical-Critical' Method," 43.

the editorial levels of the books, just as *Fortschreibung* is not just a scribal elaboration (see above). When we consider all these inadequate criteria for distinguishing prophetic passages from scribal elaborations (mainly because they could be used by all participants in the growth of prophetic literature, from the prophet to the last editor), this indeed leaves us with the need to search for valid distinctions between layers of literary evolution in each of the two books (and the entire prophetic literature).

This scholarly conversation has allowed both Martti and Dalit to put in writing major methodological observations with which each of us has been intensively working for many years now. For the first time, and with great mutual respect, we have openly laid out our arguments for critical consideration. We can only hope that those points we agree upon, and not least, those we continue to disagree on, will be of service to students and scholars. The prophetic activity, prophetic messages, and prophetic writings certainly deserve further and fresh thought.

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5

Refining the Criteria for Identifying Scriptural Traditions in Late Second Temple Jewish Sources

Jessi Orpana and Christian Seppänen

5.1. Introduction

The extensive examination of the Dead Sea Scrolls over the last seventy years has radically changed scholarly understanding of the canonization processes of the Hebrew Bible. Two aspects related to the Dead Sea Scrolls material have especially challenged previous models. The first is *the textual plurality* in the late Second Temple period, and the second is *the dating of the gradual canonization process* of the Hebrew Bible. Earlier models of canonization provided a special status for the medieval Masoretic Text (MT) and its supposed precursor, the proto-MT, largely because such a status was often assumed in earlier textual studies. Textual plurality attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls and a rehabilitation of the Septuagint as an important textual witness has made such models outdated. The Masoretic Text has long been the primary textual tradition that other textual evidence has been compared to and read against. This has resulted in, for instance, the categorization of the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls in relation to the Masoretic Text (MT-like and/or proto-MT), the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint, and led a large part of the evidence to be classified under the rubric “non-aligned.” Such a categorization is problematic because the works do not consistently resemble these later text types but instead are in many cases mixed.¹

1. See, e.g., Hanne von Weissenberg, “‘Aligned’ or ‘Non-aligned’? The Textual Status of the Qumran Cave 4 Manuscripts of the Minor Prophets,” in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations—Redactional Pro-*

Another outdated aspect of several earlier theories on the canonization of the Hebrew Bible is the view that the selection of books as well as their content and text type were fixed at a meeting of rabbis in Jamnia in circa 90 CE at the latest. Even though the hypothesis of a fixed canonized collection of books and a standardized text from Jamnia onward and also the historicity of the council² is nowadays rejected, there is still a widespread and persistent assumption that the works and collections of sacred texts now in the Hebrew Bible as well as their textual form would have been relatively fixed and stable well before the end of the Second Temple period and that disagreements only related to some textual details and to the status of some individual books in the Ketuvim. The above-mentioned theories of canonization not only continue to have major repercussions for current and future studies on textual history of the books now in the Hebrew Bible, but they also affect the textual studies of texts and traditions that held a special status for early Jewish groups even though they did not end up in the later canons of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

Gradual processes of the scripturalization of sacred texts can be examined only by acknowledging the evident textual plurality and the indications in the preserved manuscript evidence of which texts and traditions were considered sacred by the Qumran movement and by broader circles in early Judaism.³ Coming to solid conclusions about these matters is not easy because the surviving textual sources contain various kinds of indications and views about which texts and traditions were considered sacred in their original contexts. To fully understand these sources and their claims of sacredness, both internal and external, scholars have been forced to turn their focus back to the concepts that have been used in scholarship and to critically reevaluate their usefulness and accuracy in relation to both the textual sources and textual plurality as well as the

cesses—*Historical Insights*, ed. Rainer Albertz, James D. Nogalski, and Jakob Wöhrle, BZAW 433 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 381–96.

2. E.g., Jack Lewis, “Jamnia Revisited,” in *Canon Debate*, ed. Lee McDonald and James S. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 146–62.

3. We distinguish between the processes of canonization and scripturalization. The first entails the text historical developments and decisions made by religious authorities that gradually yielded various kinds of fixed collections of sacred texts, i.e., canons. In our use and for the purposes of this article, the latter, scripturalization process, covers all those traditions that might have been sacred to one or more Jewish groups in the Second Temple period even though they did not enter any canons that were later formed. For related terms, see section “Key Concepts and Terminology” below.

sociohistorical circumstances that we imagine. To better appreciate and contextualize the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have reconceptualized what is defined as sacred and scriptural and what kind of terminology would grasp these phenomena in a context in which textual plurality seems to have been the reality and norm rather than the exception.⁴ The plurality of Scripture was apparently not a problem for the Jewish groups represented by the currently available textual and epigraphic evidence, such as the Qumran movement. Rather, for these groups, various available versions of the books now in the Hebrew Bible seem to have been equally valuable. It is possible that some other groups could have preferred a specific version of a text, but it is equally possible that diverse versions were not available for all groups, which could lead to false assumptions on preference where it might rather have been a matter of availability. In addition, there are clues that other works preserved the same wider traditions, like Jubilees in relation to Genesis and parts of Exodus, and that these works were considered by some groups valuable parts of the overall tradition, on a par with writings that later became canonical. Such observations have forced scholars to reevaluate the wider claim that, even though the Law and the Prophets seemed to have been sacred for most Jewish groups in the late Second Temple period, this overall agreement on the conceptual level is not enough to draw the conclusion that the Law was understood by everyone exclusively as the five books of Moses, let alone in a particular form of the text, or that the Prophets can be simply equated with the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.⁵

4. See, for instance, Armin Lange, "The Textual Plurality of Jewish Scriptures in the Second Temple Period in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Qumran and the Bible: Studying the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Nóra Dávid and Armin Lange, CBET 57 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 43–96; Philip S. Alexander, "Textual Authority and the Problem of the Biblical Canon at Qumran," in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 42–68; George J. Brooke, "Textual Plurality in the Pesharim," *RevQ* 30 (2018): 143–57. For an example on Qumran rule texts, see, Jutta Jokiranta and Hanna Vanonen, "Multiple Copies of Rule Texts or Multiple Rule Texts? Boundaries of the S and M Documents," in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko, PFES 108 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015), 11–60.

5. See, e.g., Katell Berthelot, "Authoritative Scriptures: Torah and Related Texts," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte

The study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the worldview of the Qumran movement have raised an important question about the relationship between the so-called sectarian texts and the earlier traditions. The intriguing question is whether the sectarian texts were considered more authoritative and/or sacred than the earlier traditions or vice versa or whether there existed another kind of relationship and dynamics.⁶ There are no lists of sacred texts or traditions among the Qumran manuscript discoveries, but by investigating the available textual evidence, it is possible to establish pertinent criteria that can potentially reveal which texts and wider traditions were most likely considered sacred by the Qumran movement. Scholars have investigated both the status of individual literary works as well as the status and content of wider collections, for example, law, prophets, psalms, historical books, and wisdom works within the Qumran movement.⁷ Furthermore, the Qumran manuscript evidence and the use of specific literary

Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 264–69, with references to further reading. Cf. Jason M. Silverman, “Are the Concepts of ‘Torah’ and ‘the Prophets’ Texts or Something Else? Educational, Media, and Elite Contexts from the Persian Empire Onwards,” in *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, CBET 109 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 3–32.

6. See, for instance, Florentino García Martínez, “Beyond the Sectarian Divide: The ‘Voice of the Teacher’ as an Authority-Conferring Strategy in Some Qumran Texts,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuller, STDJ 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 227–44.

7. For a discussion on the relationship between the Qumran texts and these wider traditions and their authoritative status for the Qumran movement, see Mika S. Pajunen, “Qumranin liikkeen pyhät traditiot,” in *Kirjakääröistä digiraamattuun: Pyhän tekstin idea, muoto ja käyttö*, ed. Jutta Jokiranta and Nina Nikki, PFES 122 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2021), 39–67, with references to further reading. See also Mika S. Pajunen and Katri Antin, “Laululla tuntoni tilitän, veisulla menneet selitän, Jumalani psalmeissa kohtaan! Psalmien moninaiset käyttötavat ja Psalmien kirjan kanonisointiprosessi,” *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 118 (2013): 55–66; Alex Jassen, “The Prophets in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn Sharp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 353–72; Jesper Høgenhaven, “Psalms as Prophecy: Qumran Evidence for the Reading of Psalms as Prophetic Text and the Formation of the Canon,” in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Jeremy Penner, BZAW 486 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 231–51; and Berthelot, “Authoritative Scriptures.” For additional studies related to Scriptures within wider Judaism, see Mladen Popović, ed., *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism*, JJSJSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

works in other texts have prompted the question to what extent, if at all, the historical books of the Hebrew Bible were considered sacred by the Qumran movement or other groups in early Judaism.⁸

Scholarly evaluations of the sacredness of texts build upon clusters of criteria that have been utilized in a variety of ways. On the one hand, scholars use slightly different criteria to evaluate the same source material, and on the other hand, mutually shared criteria are often understood and defined in different ways. The criteria applied to textual sources have a major impact on how they are interpreted, situated, and evaluated within the wider phenomena of textual plurality and scripturalization, and they affect the extent of possible conclusions to be drawn. Therefore, it is important to regularly examine the criteria and refine them in accordance with the advancing research on each of the areas related to the transmission of scriptural traditions in late Second Temple Judaism.

A few attempts have been made to grasp the complexity of defining scriptural texts and traditions in late Second Temple Judaism. The most influential models try to illustrate scriptural status as a scale with two opposite ends that indicate low and high scriptural status for the texts and traditions that are placed on the scales.⁹ Placements on the scale have been made according to a set of criteria, but currently there is not a mutually agreed list of the criteria to be used or a clear sense of the hierarchy of the criteria. In the future, there should be more discussion about the repercussions of setting one criterion in a more dominant role than others. The criteria indicate different aspects of the complex phenomena of scriptural status, but more importantly, some criteria weigh more than others.

8. See, e.g., George J. Brooke, "The Books of Chronicles and the Scrolls from Qumran," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy Lim, and Brian Aucker, VTSup 113 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 35–48; Anneli Aejmelaeus, "When Did the Books of Samuel Become Scripture?," in *From Author to Copyist: Essays on the Composition, Redaction, and Transmission of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Zipi Talshir*, ed. Cana Werman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 263–81. For a broader discussion of the developing status of texts and collections, see Timothy H. Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

9. Timothy H. Lim (*Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 119–47) has suggested that authoritative works should be placed on a scale that reflects relative values of authority. As an example, he is inclined to place source texts in a more authoritative position than texts that interpret them. In the case of sectarian texts, he leaves the question open.

Thus the focus of this chapter is on evaluating the criteria that scholars have created and utilized for assessing the status of traditions and texts. Moreover, scholars have utilized and continue to use varied terminology in attempting to accurately describe and discuss texts and traditions in relation to the historical and social context of the late Second Temple period. Some of this terminology is widely shared even though it is understood in slightly different ways, but there are some controversial terms over which scholarly disagreements and preferences continue to cloud the issues discussed.

The value of this chapter for current and future studies on scriptural traditions is first that it gathers and categorizes various criteria for sacred traditions present in scholarly publications. Second, these criteria are scrutinized, evaluated, and, when necessary, problematized with examples from late Second Temple period Jewish sources. This means that the criteria are studied in close relation with the available textual evidence instead of merely in a philosophical and/or theoretical capacity. Third, the well-grounded argument that none of the sources are sacred in their own right (even though they may present themselves as such) but instead require a community to actively accept and sometimes further promote their status is taken seriously.¹⁰ Following this line of thought, communities are at the heart of scripturalization. It needs to be noted that what was considered Scripture by one community might not be that for other communities. The surviving textual evidence provides clues to the status, use, and interpretation of various traditions within specific communities and scribal circles.

5.2. Key Concepts and Terminology

The discussion on the sacredness of particular texts and traditions in the late Second Temple period needs to recognize the prevailing textual plurality and its repercussions for evaluating the connections between the

10. E.g., Francis Borchardt, "Influence and Power: The Types of Authority in the Process of Scripturalization," *SJOT* 29 (2015): 182–96; Berthelot, "Authoritative Scriptures," 264; Kelley Coblentz Bautch and Jack Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures: Other Texts," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 280–86. See also Jutta Jokiranta and Nina Nikki, "Johdanto: Mikään teksti ei ole itsessään pyhä," in *Kirjakääröistä digi-raamattuun: Pyhän tekstin idea, muoto ja käyttö*, ed. Jutta Jokiranta and Nina Nikki, PFES 122 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2021), 12–36.

surviving textual evidence. When investigating which texts, works, collections or wider traditions were sacred for certain groups, scholars are faced with the challenge of a plurality of texts and traditions represented by ancient textual sources. It is, therefore, important to pause and briefly consider how this plurality was conceptualized in late Second Temple period sources.¹¹ Which manuscripts represent the same work or later book of the Hebrew Bible and which of them are copies of partly similar but fundamentally different works? Furthermore, how should the various versions, translations, rewritings and/or later interpretations be situated in relation to earlier traditions and contemporary sources? What makes textual plurality and the plurality of Scripture in the late Second Temple period such a multifaceted question is the production, coexistence and circulation of textual material attesting multiple, partly overlapping versions of the same sacred texts and traditions.

The extensive study of the surviving textual evidence is naturally crucial, but it is also important to acknowledge that the way we imagine the reality of early Jewish groups and the texts and traditions considered sacred depends heavily on the concepts and terminology used in scholarship. There is, rightfully, a tendency to reject terminology, such as the terms *Bible* and *biblical*, that is anachronistic within the late Second Temple context.¹² One way to avoid such terminology while emphasizing the sacred status of works is to utilize the terms *Scripture* and *scriptural* instead. In this chapter, the terms *Scripture* and *scriptural* traditions are employed in an inclusive manner. *Scripture*, therefore, covers religious works and traditions that were held sacred by at least some Jewish communities in the late

11. Mika S. Pajunen, "Textual Plurality of Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Theories of Textual Transmission," *BN* 186 (2020): 7–28, offers models on how to conceptualize textual plurality and how to operate with the Dead Sea Scrolls within this framework. See also Pajunen, "Glocal, Local, or Group Specific? Origins of Some Particular Scribal and Interpretive Practices in the Qumran Scrolls," in *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, CBET 109 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 33–55. Jessi Orpana, "Complexity of Plural Traditions and the Concept of Representation," *BN* 189 (2021): 7–28, emphasizes that entire traditions cannot be located or contained in individual representations of traditions and thus cannot be studied in their entirety because they are not stable, static, or fixed.

12. For the repercussions of the use of the terms *Bible* and *canon* in scholarship, see Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Second Temple period even though their status in these early social contexts did not lead to a canonized status later on.¹³ For the purposes of this chapter, Scripture also covers literary works that, based on the available evidence, had a sacred status both in the late Second Temple period and as part of some later canons.¹⁴ It does not include works that do not seem to have had a sacred status for any Jewish community in the late Second Temple period even though they were later included in one or more of the canons of Scripture.¹⁵ Furthermore, Scripture as a term already covers the notion of sacredness, and therefore there is no need to emphasize this aspect by using tautologic expressions such as “sacred Scripture.” Also, the term *tradition* is used inclusively, covering both wider traditions that circulated in the late Second Temple period among various Jewish communities and all the separate representations of these traditions dating to the period.¹⁶

5.3. Criteria for Identifying Sacred Texts and/or Traditions

In the following, we introduce commonly used criteria for identifying texts or traditions that were potentially considered sacred/scriptural in a specific societal context. Furthermore, we discuss the advantages and limitations of each criterion. As will be shown, some of the criteria are not mutually exclusive but are rather intertwined in many cases. The categorization is also more or less artificial in the sense that this and similar categorizations have been made from the viewpoint of postmodern scholarship. It is thus meant to be used as a tool to manage the various criteria and as an aid in the critical discussion of them. Hence, the categorization

13. For a lengthy discussion on the concept of authority, see Hanne von Weissenberg, “Defining Authority,” in *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes: Studies in the Biblical Text in Honour of Anneli Aejmelaeus*, ed. Kristin De Troyer, T. Michael Law and Marketta Liljeström, CBET 72 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 679–95. For reflections from the vantage point of the Dead Sea Scrolls, see George J. Brooke, “Authority and the Authoritativeness of Scripture: Some Clues from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *RevQ* 25 (2012): 507–23. For a take on authority as reception, see Borchardt, “Influence and Power.”

14. Such works are referred to as *later Scriptures* in this article to avoid the designations Bible and biblical, which presuppose the formation of canon.

15. Consider here, for example, Wisdom of Solomon, 2–4 Baruch, and the diverse literary works of the Ezra tradition.

16. *Tradition* is understood to be much wider than any work or a text that represents it. See further, Orpana, “Complexity of Plural Traditions,” 7–28.

does not stem from the ancient sources themselves and does not reflect the transmission processes or scribal activity of the Second Temple period. In general, the criteria can be divided into three categories:¹⁷ (1) external factors, (2) internal factors, and (3) intertextual factors. When proceeding in this order, the starting point is the material object from which the focus moves to what the text presents. These steps are followed by an investigation of the possible connections to other texts.

External factors focus on aspects other than the content of the text itself. They shed light on how the text was valued within a certain frame of reference in a particular geographical, historical, cultural, and sociolinguistic context. These factors can be, for example, physical features of the manuscripts or knowledge about the society that produced the texts. *Internal factors* focus on the text itself: what are the features and traits of the text that could imply sacredness or claims to sacredness? Generally, these are explicit or implicit claims for the sacredness of a given text, such as its divine origin or a generally recognized authority as the implied author. However, no text lives in a vacuum or is significant in and of itself. Thus, claims for sacredness in a text do not necessarily guarantee its scriptural status in various groups and changing contexts. Furthermore, a text can be sacred for one community, while it may not have that same status in another community. This leads to the identification of other types of factors than only internal ones. *Intertextual factors* concentrate on the relationship between texts and how the sacredness of a text is reflected in intertextual phenomena such as quotations, allusions, translation, and rewriting. The use of a text as a source of a quotation can be a sign of the special status of the source text. At the same time, the quotation may amplify the claims to sacredness of the target text as well. Thus, intertextual factors are both complex and interdependent.

The criteria commonly used as potential indicators to determine the sacredness of a text/tradition for a particular community (arranged according to the above three categories) are the following:

17. See Coblenz Bautch and Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures," 281; Pajunen, "Qumranin liikeen pyhät traditiot," 39–67; Jokiranta and Nikki, "Johdanto," esp. 13–25, where the authors introduce and apply the model of three worlds: (1) the literary level, that is the inner world of the text, (2) the symbolic world of the text, and (3) the concrete world of the text, as well, the inner connections of these three levels in the study of sacred texts.

- 5.3.1. External factors
 - 5.3.1.1. Number of copies
 - 5.3.1.2. Presence of ancient translations
 - 5.3.1.3. Continued use and sacredness of texts in (religious) communities
 - 5.3.1.4. (External) markers in manuscripts (e.g., Tetragrammaton or graphical division)
- 5.3.2. Internal factors: claims of sacredness and divine revelation
- 5.3.3. Intertextual factors
 - 5.3.3.1. God as the ultimate author
 - 5.3.3.2. Explicit and implicit quotations and references to other texts
 - 5.3.3.3. Influence on or relationship to practices endorsed in other texts (e.g., calendar)
 - 5.3.3.4. (Listing) explicit references to a specific scriptural book or a collection
 - 5.3.3.5. Translation technique

In the next step, we will discuss and problematize these criteria one by one presenting some examples from late Second Temple Jewish literature.

5.3.1. External Factors

5.3.1.1. *Number of Copies*

The number of copies is one of the most used and discussed criteria for the sacredness of a text to the community/-ies in possession of the manuscripts.¹⁸ Evidently, this criterion is based on common sense and reasoning: texts that the community valued and considered important must have been copied and circulated more than texts that did not have

18. E.g., Berthelot, "Authoritative Scriptures," 265; Coblenz Bautch and Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures," 281; James C. VanderKam, "Authoritative Literature in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *DSD* 5 (1998): 384–85; VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 66–67; Timothy H. Lim, "Authoritative Scriptures and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 306, 308; Mika S. Pajunen, "Bible," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 371–74.

much importance. The reasoning and the general picture cannot be disputed. That said, though, there are some remarks that must be added. First of all, the number of preserved manuscripts does not directly indicate the number of manuscripts that existed in antiquity. The preservation of ancient manuscripts is fragmentary and incidental. The preserved manuscripts do not necessarily represent their exact distribution in antiquity but are like keyholes or snapshots. A sufficient number of manuscripts can diminish the randomness of preservation, but the randomness does not disappear entirely. More importantly, rather than indicating the sacredness of a text, a large number of copies rather proves to be an indication of the value and appreciation of a text. Still, texts that were valued and appreciated were more likely to be considered sacred as well, but not necessarily.¹⁹ It is also noteworthy that manuscripts were made for different purposes. The existence of a manuscript does not directly indicate whether it was copied for liturgical use or to be part of a collection in a library. This matter can, however, be approached by analyzing the individual manuscripts. Evidently, the liturgical use often implies more significance in terms of sacredness.

The criterion of number of copies must be used with caution. When counting the number of manuscripts of different works, it is not uncommon that one cannot be sure whether some fragments belong to the same or to a different manuscript. Furthermore, the division into different books is not unambiguous. It seems that none of the Torah manuscripts contained all five books; instead, each contained only some of them (e.g., 4QGen–Exod^a, 4QExod–Lev^f). The same holds true with regard to the Book of the Twelve.²⁰ In addition, should Ezra and Nehemiah be counted as separate works or as constituting one work, sometimes written on the same scroll? Thus, such values are not absolute but approximations. The situation is even more complex when discussing the various collections. Psalms manuscripts were apparently not meant to be collections of 150 psalms. Rather,

19. Even copying manuscripts can be seen as a tool to increase the prevalence, value, and awareness of a certain text. A prerequisite of a sacred text is that the text is known and accessible, either literally or orally. The more manuscripts of a certain text there are circulating, the more known the text is.

20. See Mika S. Pajunen, “The Minor Prophets in the Judean Desert Manuscripts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Minor Prophets*, ed. Julia M. O’Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 57–68, which covers all the Dead Sea Scrolls of Minor Prophets.

they contain only some psalms. None of the preserved psalms manuscripts contains exactly the 150 canonical psalms in the Hebrew Bible.²¹

Keeping in mind the remarks above, the number of copies can still be used as a criterion for Scripture. It can give clues to what might have been considered sacred by particular Jewish groups in the late Second Temple period, but it must not be used as the decisive or only criterion.²² Furthermore, there is no reason why the criterion of number of copies should be limited only to texts that became part of the Hebrew Bible.²³ When comparing the number of manuscripts found at Qumran, several other literary works are attested more often than some later canonical works. These are Jubilees (fourteen manuscripts), 1 Enoch (eleven), Community Rule (twelve), 4QInstruction (eight), and 4QMMT (six–seven). For example, the books of Samuel (four), Ruth (four), and Kings (two) are attested in fewer manuscripts than the former. This suggests that the former works may have had a similar or even greater significance for the Qumran community than many texts found later in the Hebrew Bible.

5.3.1.2. *Presence of Ancient Translations*

The existence of a translation or translations of a work is sometimes taken as an indicator of the sacredness of a text.²⁴ This is based on the assumption that a text must have been significant enough that there was a need to translate it. However, the presence of a translation does not automatically imply a sacred value for a text, only that it held a significant status—at least in the community that was responsible for the translation. In this sense, this criterion can be compared to the number of manuscripts. There are even more similarities: the translation of a certain text may not have been preserved until modern times like a lost branch of manuscripts. The preservation of a translation is connected to the community that uses it. Thus, the nonexistence of a translation is not an indication of the text not being sacred.

21. Pajunen, “Bible,” 372.

22. Lim, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 308, considers the number of the copies as “important corroborative evidence.”

23. Pajunen, “Bible,” 371–72.

24. Christian Seppänen and Hanne von Weissenberg, “Raamattu ennen kaanonian: Kirjoitusten arvovaltaisuus Qumranin teksteissä,” *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 118 (2013): 204–5; Coblentz Bartsch and Weinbender, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 281.

More important than the existence of an ancient translation is the context of its use and the purpose for which it was made. A text that was translated for liturgical purposes, for example, or for the sake of religious legitimation was more likely considered sacred than a mere historical record or story.²⁵ It should be noted that a vast number of texts was translated for various purposes, not just Scriptures for religious use. When investigating translations of supposedly sacred texts, it is important to ask who made the translation and how it was received, for example, in diaspora contexts (see also criterion 5.3.3.5 in this chapter).²⁶

5.3.1.3. *Continued Use and Sacredness of Texts in (Religious) Communities*

Another important hint can be the knowledge that a single text was *continually used in a community and was known to have a sacred status*.²⁷ However, one must bear in mind that scriptural status at a certain time does not automatically mean that the text enjoyed a similar status, say, a few centuries earlier. The book of Jubilees is a good example. The continuous liturgical use of Jubilees in the Ethiopic church implies that the text did not achieve its status suddenly but had a long history. Thus, it is reasonable to discuss the status of Jubilees in antiquity as well. However, one cannot actually argue for the scriptural status of a text on the basis of its use by a later or earlier community. Likewise, the lack of a sacred status in later communities does not imply a similar lack in antiquity. All in all, this argument is nothing more than a heuristic tool.

5.3.1.4. *External Markers*

Scholars have discussed whether there are external traits in manuscripts that could indicate the scriptural status of a text. Perhaps the most convincing

25. Different texts may also have different kinds of authority. The authority of a narration or historical record can be different from that of legislative text. See Aejmeleus, "When Did the Books of Samuel Become Scripture?," 269–70.

26. Pajunen, "Qumranin liikeen pyhät traditiot," 47–48 notes that there is no indication that texts were translated within the Qumran movement. Sectarian texts were apparently written only in Hebrew, and the discovered manuscripts written in other languages were brought to Qumran from other locations.

27. Coblentz Baugh and Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures," 281.

marker is found in the pesharim.²⁸ In the pesharim, cited text is at times graphically distinguished from the commentary by a blank space between the texts. Evidently, the author(s) of the pesharim did not want to merge the source text and its explanation. This could indicate that the source text enjoyed an approved and recognized position in the community. Since the pesherist may have changed the wording of the source text, one cannot argue that the source text remained fixed or unalterable. This does not mean that the source text did not have a special standing but rather that it was considered sacred in such a way that its wording could be changed. This is usually understood to mean that the text/tradition itself (that is, the content) is sacred, not the exact wording.²⁹ It seems that the source text had already enjoyed an enhanced status and that the pesherist used it to amplify the importance of the pesher itself.³⁰

Another external marker that could indicate sacredness of a text is that the Tetragrammaton has been written in Paleo-Hebrew script in one or more of the preserved manuscripts of that text. In his article, "Authoritative Literature in the Dead Sea Scrolls," James C. VanderKam lists seven manuscripts that are written in square script but employ Paleo-Hebrew for the Tetragrammaton: 1QpMic, 1QpHab, 1QpZeph, 2QExod^b, 4QPs^a, 4QIsa^c, and 11QPs^a.³¹ In addition, similar usage of the Tetragrammaton is found also in 3QLam, 4QExod^j, 4QLev^g, 4QpIsa^a, 4QpPs^a, 4Q183 and 11QLev^b.³² It is worth noting that all these manuscripts are either manuscripts of probably scriptural texts or com-

28. For textual plurality and scribal techniques in the pesharim, see, Brooke, "Textual Plurality," 143–57.

29. John J. Collins, "Changing Scripture," in *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila, BZAW 419 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 93.

30. George J. Brooke, "Between Authority and Canon: The Significance of Reworking the Bible for Understanding the Canonical Process," in *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, STDJ 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 97–99.

31. VanderKam, "Authoritative Literature," 386, using the list in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 220.

32. The list is based on Martin G. Abegg Jr., ed., "Index of Dead Sea Scrolls Manuscripts," with the assistance of Casey Toews, Christopher Davis, Russell Taylor, and James Tucker, Accordance Bible Software, version 4.4 (OakTree Software, 2015).

mentaries thereof.³³ If we accept the view that not only was the cited text authoritative, but the pesharim themselves were also considered that,³⁴ then it seems that the Tetragrammaton in Paleo-Hebrew is used only in texts considered or claiming to be sacred. This conclusion also assumes that the above-mentioned texts were considered sacred as well. One may safely assume the Pentateuch to have been widely accepted as sacred. Psalms seem to have had a similar status.³⁵ Interestingly, the book of Lamentations is included in the list.

At first glance, the Paleo-Hebrew Tetragrammaton seems to be a reasonable argument for the sacred status of a work, but if one studies the use of Paleo-Hebrew more broadly, the issue becomes more complex. Besides the Tetragrammaton, Paleo-Hebrew is used also for other epithets of God.³⁶ The word *El* in Paleo-Hebrew is found in the Composition concerning Divine Providence (4Q413) and in one manuscript of the Damascus Document (4QD^c), while one manuscript of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^g (4QShirShabb^g) and the work called Pseudo-Daniel (4QpsDan^a ar) employ *Elohim* in Paleo-Hebrew. In addition, another manuscript of the Damascus Document (4QD^b) contains *El* in Paleo-Hebrew in some instances but not consistently.³⁷ Also, the above-mentioned 4QIsa^c does not only write the Tetragrammaton in Paleo-Hebrew but also Sabaoth, *Elohim*, and Adonay.³⁸ This leads to the conclusion that the Paleo-Hebrew epithets of God—including the Tetragrammaton—are not proof of the sacredness of

33. Although not much is preserved in 4Q183, it is evidently some kind of commentary, labeled a “Peshar-Like Fragment” or possibly a manuscript of Eschatological Midrash (4QMidrEschat^e), see Abegg, *Index*, s.v. “4Q183”; and Casey D. Elledge and Lidija Novakovic, “Peshar-Like Fragment (4Q183),” in *Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents*, vol. 6b of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Henry W. Rietz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 358–61.

34. See Lim, *Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 305–6.

35. See, e.g., Roman Vielhauer, “Authoritative Scriptures: Prophets and Related Texts,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 270.

36. For a discussion of the divine name in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek through the Second Temple period, see Anthony Meyer, *Naming God in Early Judaism*, Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

37. See, e.g., Damascus Document (4QD^b) 3 7; 9 I, 2; 9 IV, 4; 9 V, 4 (Paleo-Hebrew); 2 5; 2 7; 2 13; 7 6; 9 IV, 11 (square script).

38. Sabaoth: see, e.g., 4QIsa^c 3–5+10 10; 9 I, 25; 18–20 11; 24 38; 62 1. *Elohim*: see, e.g., 4QIsa^c 24 39; 33–35+55–57 10; 36–38 3. Adonay: see, e.g., 4QIsa^c 63 2.

a text as such, but more likely they are a way to emphasize the sanctity of God. Thus, this can also be a device to enhance the significance of a text indirectly. The primary function of the Paleo-Hebrew script is not to promote the sacredness of the text but the sanctity and holiness of God.

Actually, one should take into account not only the epithets of God but also the manuscripts that are written entirely in Paleo-Hebrew. These are mainly manuscripts of the Torah and one manuscript of Job.³⁹ Thus, the Paleo-Hebrew script has been taken as an indication of a scriptural status of these texts.⁴⁰ Other texts written in Paleo-Hebrew are a parabolic text (4Q123 = 4QParaphrase of Joshua) and two unidentified texts (4Q124–125). In addition, the character of some of these texts as copies of currently canonical literary works is disputed, and George J. Brooke argues that at least 4QpaleoExod^m and 11QpaleoLev^a can be categorized as reworked Scripture as well. Thus, Paleo-Hebrew script cannot be used as a decisive indicator for a sacred text. However, its distribution and presence in manuscripts of texts commonly considered sacred in late Second Temple Judaism and texts related to the same traditions is probably not an accident. The use of Paleo-Hebrew script may well have been a device or a technique to promote a text and to amplify its claims to sacredness.

5.3.2. Internal Factors: Claims to Sacredness and Divine Revelation

Many texts make claims for a special status as divine revelation that are based on their implied origins and content. The main literary strategies for such claims are to present the content as written by an inspired implied author, to present it as being received through divine revelation, to use first person singular forms as indicators of the presence of God speaking, and to use authorial figures or groups, such as priests, to promote the sacredness of the text and its content.⁴¹ All these strategies ultimately emphasize a divine source for what is presented in the works in different ways. For example, Moses is portrayed as the inspired author of the

39. 1QpaleoLev, 2QpaleoLev, 4QpaleoGen^m, 4QpaleoExod^m, 4QpaleoDeut^r, 4QpaleoDeut^s, 4QpaleoJob^c, 6QpaleoGen, 6QpaleoLev, 11QpaleoLev^a.

40. Brooke, "Between Authority and Canon," 92.

41. See Seppänen and von Weissenberg, "Raamattu ennen kaanonina," 205–7; Berthelot, "Authoritative Scriptures," 254. For authority-conferring strategies, see, Hindy Najman, *Past Renewals: Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation, and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity*, JSJSup 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 39–41, 49.

five books of Moses, Jubilees, and the so-called Moses Apocryphon from Qumran, and David is the inspired implied author of psalms.⁴² Using divine revelation as the media for special revelation, hidden knowledge, or correct interpretation is a scribal strategy to claim special importance for scribes' writing(s). For example, the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls extensively utilize patriarchal dream visions,⁴³ but revelations are present in other works as well. In the inner dynamics of a text, the ultimate source of the revelation and its legitimacy is not the author, the one to whom the revelation is revealed, or the revelation itself. It is rather the source of the revelation, that is, God.

In addition to revealing matters concerning the future and the divine will, revelations may claim priority for a specific interpretation of earlier traditions in relation to past, present, or future events. The centrality of correct interpretations is attested in many Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls in which the various patriarchs reveal correct interpretations to the next generation in an unbroken chain of custody. Another example is the near mythical founder of the Qumran movement, the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom correct interpretations of earlier traditions have been divinely revealed. The Sinai framework of Jubilees combines divine revelation to Moses and the first-person singular speech of God. According to God's command, the angel of the presence dictates to Moses everything that has been, is, and will come to pass.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the use of human

42. For Moses as the author of the five books of Moses, see, e.g., Deut 31:9: "Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel" (ESV). Cf. also 31:22–24. The so-called Moses Apocryphon is preserved in 1Q22, 1Q29, and 4Q375–376. References to implied authors, such as Moses and David, should not lead to the conclusion that the content, or the text form for that matter, is equivalent to the Pentateuch or the Psalter of later canons. In addition to David, even Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Haggai, Zakaria, Hezekiah, and Manasseh are mentioned as authors of individual psalms.

43. E.g., Andrew B. Perrin, *The Dynamics of Dream-Vision Revelation in the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls*, JASup 19 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Jessi Orpana, "Assessing the Priestly Provenance of the Qumran Aramaic Texts," in *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, CBET 109 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 119–214.

44. Also note the use of the heavenly tablets as the divinely authoritative source of what is revealed to Moses.

first-person speech, such as ancestors of note, may be seen as a legitimization strategy employed extensively in the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls.

After briefly introducing some of the main literary strategies used in texts to claim a special status for a literary work, it is necessary to evaluate the usefulness of these observations for the discussion of criteria to identify sacred texts and traditions. One obvious point of criticism is that these are internal factors, and their claims for a prominent status reflect their authors' aims and agenda to present the works as sacred with unique divine revelation. The choice of strategy as well as the content presented may at best reflect the authors' imagination of the intended audience, but the investigation of internal factors does not reveal anything about the actual reception of the claims made by the authors and their works. Therefore, when evaluating which texts and traditions were considered sacred by different communities at different times, internal factors, at least on their own, are of little if any help. This set of criteria is thus not as weighty as the other criteria discussed in the present chapter.

5.3.3. Intertextual Factors

5.3.3.1. *God as the Ultimate Author*

According to Eugene Ulrich, Scriptures are authoritative works whose ultimate author is considered to be God.⁴⁵ It is not sufficient for a work itself to declare that its content comes from God, but instead we are interested in references that claim other works to be ultimately authored by God.⁴⁶ An example of this is found in:

1QM XI, 5–7

Jus[t a]s You told us in time past, saying: "There shall come forth a star from Jacob, a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall crush the forehead of Moab and tear down all sons of Sheth, and he shall descend from

45. Eugene C. Ulrich, "Methodological Reflections on Determining Scriptural Status in First Century Judaism," in *Rediscovering the Dead Sea Scrolls: An Assessment of Old and New Approaches and Methods*, ed. Maxine L. Grossman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 149.

46. Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012), 67.

Jacob and shall destroy the remnant from the city, and the enemy shall be a possession, and Israel shall do valiantly.” (Num 24:17, 19, 18ac)⁴⁷

The citation from Num 24 is presented as first-person words of God. This is not only the case in the citations from the Pentateuch, but the prophets are cited similarly, for instance:

CD VI, 13–14

For God said, “Would that one of you would lock my door so that you should not light up my altar in vain.” (Mal 1:10)

In some cases, the mediator for God’s words is explicitly expressed, and there is a construction *through* (בִּיד) which God has spoken, for example, Moses or a prophet:

1QM X, 6–7

They shall recount that which You s[poke] *by the hand of Moses*, saying: “And when there is a war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then yo[u] shall sound an alarm with the trumpets and you will be remembered before your God and be saved from your enemies.” (Num 10:9, emphasis added)

CD IV, 13–14

Belial is unrestrained in Israel, just as God said *by Isaiah the prophet*, the son of Amoz, saying, “Fear and pit and snare are upon thee, dweller in the land.” (Isa 24:17, emphasis added)

Evidently, this is a strong criterion. These kinds of statements reveal that at least the author who cites the earlier work considered its source or some of its parts as the word of God and thus binding for religious practices. According to VanderKam, citations that come from the mouth of God are “an unmistakable clue to the status enjoyed by these texts.”⁴⁸ This argument cannot be refuted. However, it cannot be taken for granted that the attitude of the new text and its author (that is, that the earlier work is sacred and binding) was accepted by all its potential audiences.

47. All translations of the Qumran scrolls are from Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg Jr., and Edward M. Cook, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

48. VanderKam, “Authoritative Literature,” 391.

5.3.3.2. *Explicit and Implicit Quotations and References to Other Texts*

In the Qumran scrolls, there are numerous citations from earlier texts.⁴⁹ Often, the citation is introduced by formulas such as “as it is written” (כִּי כֵן / כְּתוּב / כְּאֲשֶׁר כְּתוּב) or “as it is said” (אֲשֶׁר אָמַר), for instance:

1QS V, 15

On the contrary, one must keep far from him in every respect, for thus it is written [כִּי כֵן כְּתוּב]: “Keep far from every false thing.” (Exod 23:7)

Introduction formulas emphasize that the command or practice mentioned in the work is not only the writer’s own idea, but he appeals to an earlier text that likely has an established status for the author’s intended audience. Clearly, this criterion is solid. According to VanderKam, the cited texts have an “extremely or rather supremely high status.”⁵⁰

It is worth noting that not only are the books of the Hebrew Bible cited by citation formulas⁵¹ but probably other works as well. The phrase “for thus is it written in the divisions of,” found in 4Q228 1 I, 9, may be a reference to Jubilees. Unfortunately, the text breaks off, and the actual citation is not preserved.

Quotations may also occur implicitly, that is, without an introductory formula, for instance:

CD IV, 21

... although the principle of creation is “male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

How should this be understood? The quotation does not seem to imply a similar status for the earlier text than it would with an introduction for-

49. On the distribution of the citations, see, e.g., VanderKam, “Authoritative Literature,” 394–96.

50. VanderKam, “Authoritative Literature,” 392; cf. also Timothy H. Lim, “An Alleged Reference to the Tripartite Division of the Hebrew Bible,” *RevQ* 77 (2001): 23–37.

51. According to VanderKam (*Dead Sea Scrolls*, 70), there are thirty-eight instances where a biblical passage is cited with introduction formulas containing כְּתוּב or אָמַר: Exodus (1), Leviticus (4), Numbers (3), Deuteronomy (5), 2 Samuel (1), Isaiah (9), Jeremiah (1), Ezekiel (4), Hosea (3), Amos (2), Micah (1), Zechariah (2), Malachi (1), Psalms (2), Proverbs (1), Daniel (2).

mula. However, some degree of importance and force is implied when another text is used as the source of a quotation.

It is not always clear which text or text form is quoted or referred to.⁵² When evaluating quotations, allusions, echoes, and the like, it is important to recognize that as scholars we operate with the available sources (that is, textual passages and text forms). Therefore, we are inclined to look for references to the textual evidence that is available to us, which might at times lead us astray. On the one hand, some links we see now may not correctly reflect the scribal activity of the late Second Temple period, and on the other hand, we might not recognize some links because not all textual sources that were available to the ancient scribes have survived. Furthermore, the direction of influence remains unclear especially with poorly preserved texts.

Explicit and implicit quotations, allusions, and other indirect references to earlier works indicate that the earlier work had a significant status for the authors and probably also for their intended audience. The mechanisms at play are multifaceted. Source texts are utilized to promote the agenda of the new work's writer and to provide a reliable basis for the author's argumentation. Furthermore, source texts are used to promote the importance and value of the author's own interpretation and/or the correct application of earlier traditions.⁵³

52. Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, JAJSup 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), contains an exhaustive list of quotations and possible allusions to Hebrew Bible texts in Second Temple literature. Pajunen, "Qumranin liikeen pyhät traditiot," 46 rightly remarks on the problem related to correctly identifying the text that is quoted or alluded to in the Qumran texts in cases where the base text is equivalent to a text found in a book of the Hebrew Bible. Consider, for example the parallel books of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles. In these cases it is uncertain whether the quotation or allusion is in fact referring to a specific text or a parallel text. A contrary example is provided by Jubilees, which promotes Genesis against the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls, thus defending its main source in comparison to parallel works.

53. For examples of the use of earlier traditions in later textual contexts and for a discussion of the techniques and dynamics at play, see, e.g., Katja Kujanpää, *The Rhetorical Functions of Scriptural Quotations in Romans: Paul's Argumentation by Quotations*, NovTSup 172 (Boston: Brill, 2018); Kujanpää, "Scriptural Authority and Scriptural Argumentation in 1 Clement," *NTS* 66 (2020): 125–43; Marika Pulkkinen, "Paul's Use of Psalms: Quotations, Allusions, and Psalm Clusters in Romans and First Corinthians" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2020).

5.3.3.3. *Influence on or Relationship to Practices Endorsed in the Scrolls*

Practices that are promoted in the texts are also used as a criterion for sacredness.⁵⁴ It is reasonable to assume that texts describing practices that contradict the established practices of a community are not given a special status. As an example, it has been argued that the book of Esther was not considered sacred by the Qumran community since Purim is not mentioned among the festivals recorded in Qumran texts.⁵⁵ This criterion is also used as a positive argument. For example, Kelley Coblenz Bautch and Jack Weinbender discuss the status of the Enochic texts for the Qumran community and note that they share the same solar-lunar calendar that is present in many sectarian texts.⁵⁶ It is clear that the Qumran movement would not have followed the solar-lunar calendar, but one cannot logically deduce that a text that employs the same calendar was necessarily sacred to them. It only shows that the text does not contradict their endorsed practices. It could, thus, potentially have been considered sacred if other more important criteria were met, but the lack of a contradiction only removes a potential obstacle rather than offers positive proof. All in all, this kind of argument is nothing more than circumstantial evidence.

5.3.3.4. *Explicit References to a Specific Scriptural Book or a Collection*

The most reliable records of books that were considered sacred at least by some Jewish groups in the late Second Temple period are explicit references to and lists of such works. Unfortunately, we do not have definite lists. We do have some references, but they are subject to interpretation. A possible tripartite division—the Torah, the Prophets, and the other books—is reflected in the prologue of the Greek version of Ben Sira. The grandson of Ben Sira writes:

Seeing that many and great things have been given to us through *the Law* and *the Prophets* and *the others that followed them* ... Iesous, my

54. Coblenz Bautsch and Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures," 281.

55. VanderKam, "Authoritative Literature," 385.

56. Coblenz Bautsch and Weinbender, "Authoritative Scriptures," 282–83. They do not consider the lunar-solar calendar to be a decisive argument for the sacred status of the book, but it demonstrates "a special link between Enochic texts and movements praxis" (283).

grandfather, since he had given himself increasingly both to the reading of *the Law* and *the Prophets* and the *other ancestral books* and since he had acquired considerable proficiency in them, he too was led to compose something pertaining to education and wisdom in order that lovers of learning, when they come under their sway as well, might gain much more in living by the law.... For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is in fact rendered in another language. And not only in this case, but also in the case of *the Law* itself and *the Prophets* and the *rest of the books*, the difference is not small when these are expressed in their own language. (NETS, emphasis added)

The Law, the Prophets, and the other books are mentioned three times in the prologue. However, there is no reason why this tripartite division should be understood as the tripartite canon that came to constitute the Hebrew Bible. First of all, nothing explicit is said about the status that these books held in the Jewish community of Ben Sira's grandson. We can only infer that they were significant enough to be worth translating (see criterion 5.3.1.2, above). Second, while we have a reference to the Law, there is nothing explicitly referring to the books of the Torah. And third, one can only imagine what books belonged to the Prophets and the other books and whether they had the same or a similar status as the Law.

A somewhat similar division is found in Josephus as well, in *C. Ap.* 1.38–40:⁵⁷

We do not have numerous books among us, which are in disagreement and contradict each other. We only have twenty-two books, which we believe to be valid (*τὰ δικάως πεπιστευμένα*), and they contain the records of the past. Of them, *five belong to Moses*, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind until his death.... *The prophets*, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times *in thirteen books*. *The remaining four books* contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

Although Josephus's work was written after the destruction of the temple, its concept of Scriptures resembles that of the prologue of Ben Sira but with the notable difference of presenting numbers for literary works in

57. Translated by Christian Seppänen. He criticizes earlier translations of *τὰ δικάως πεπιστευμένα* for reading it through a lens that presupposes the tripartite canon and later Scriptures.

the categories. As in the case of the prologue, Josephus does not explicate what the five books of Moses, the thirteen books of the prophets or the four other books are.⁵⁸ Evidently, the number of books listed is symbolic since it agrees with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Only the Torah, that is, the books of Moses, seems to be clear on the surface level, but it should be acknowledged that even in this case Josephus does not explicitly indicate that these five books are Genesis–Deuteronomy. Moreover, the text does not explicitly say what kind of status any of these books had, but it gives some hints. These books were understood as a general heritage of the Jews (“we have”). Furthermore, these books are described by the Greek word *δικαίως*, which in this context should be understood as “justified,” “approved,” or “valid”; hence these specific books had a special status compared to the others.

In the Qumran sectarian texts, one does not find explicit references to sacred books or collections. The most discussed passage is found in 4QMMT:

4Q397 14–21 10–11⁵⁹

We [have written] to you so that you might understand the book of Moses, the book[s of the Pr]ophets, and Davi[d ... the events of] the generations.

It is noteworthy that the book of Moses is referenced as a singular. Although the reference to the Torah is evident, it may not necessarily refer to the Torah as a whole but only to some portions of it.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the books that are included among the Prophets are not explicated. The mention of David is sometimes equated with Psalms as a representative of the third category of a tripartite canon,⁶¹ but this conclusion is too bold. More likely,

58. Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 162–67.

59. The passage is found only in 4Q397 and not in the parallel manuscript 4Q398. See Hanne von Weissenberg, *4QMMT: Reevaluating the Text, the Function, and the Meaning of the Epilogue*, STDJ 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 204–6.

60. Thus Katell Berthelot “4QMMT et la question du canon de la Bible hébraïque,” in *From 4QMMT to Resurrection: Mélanges qumraniens en hommage à Émile Puech*, ed. Florentino García Martínez, Annette Steudel, and Eibert Tigchelaar, STDJ 61 (Leiden: Brill 2006), 1–14; Timothy H. Lim, “The Alleged Reference to the Tripartite Division of the Hebrew Bible,” *RevQ* 77 (2001): 23–37.

61. E.g., Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4.V: Miqsat Ma’aseh Ha-Torah*, DJD 10 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 112.

the syntax of the passage (בדוד) should be understood in a way that the writer refers to the deeds of David as a model, not the writings of David.⁶²

5.3.3.5. *Translation Technique*

Not only has the existence of a translation been used as a criterion for identifying a sacred text but also the translation technique, or style of a translation. The translation technique of Aquila or the kaige-type corrections in the Septuagint imply that not just any type of translation of the source text was considered valid, but it had to be literal enough, that is, a word-for-word and concordant translation. This kind of recensional activity is already found in the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever (dated to the first century CE).⁶³ The specific kind of translation technique reflects the attitude that the text must be unchanged and that even its smallest details are significant. It would be hard to argue that somebody with this kind of attitude toward translation technique would not have considered the translated text to be sacred to some extent. Another kind of attitude is found in the prologue of the Greek version of Ben Sira. In the prologue, the translator—Ben Sira's grandson—apologizes that the translation is never the same as the original and that this holds true also for the translations of “the Law, the Prophets and the rest of the books.” Both of these attitudes reflect the notion that the original text that is translated held some kind of special status.

In the case of individual books, translation technique may reveal significant attitudes toward the text. If the text was considered sacred, it is reasonable to assume that the person who was chosen to translate it was not only considered accurate but also competent and skillful. It is well known that the Greek translation of the Pentateuch became a model for at least some subsequent translations of other books.⁶⁴ To use the Pentateuch as a model translation suggests that the other texts held a status similar to the Pentateuch. This, however, is not the case in all of the books of the

62. Lim, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 312–13.

63. See Dominique Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila: Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du dodécaprophète trouvés dans le désert de Juda* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).

64. Emanuel Tov, “The Septuagint Translation of the Torah as a Source and Resource for the Post-Pentateuchal Translators,” in *Textual Developments: Collected Essays*, vol. 4, VTSup 181 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 341–56.

Septuagint. For example, Anneli Aejmelaesus has argued that the translator of the books of Samuel lacked the competence to understand the Hebrew *Vorlage* properly. The renderings of rare Hebrew words indicate that the translator's knowledge of Hebrew was not adequate. In addition, the translator seems to have known the Pentateuch only in its Greek form, not in the underlying Hebrew.⁶⁵ Thus, the Greek Pentateuch was not used as a model for the translation, but some expressions and words were culled from the Greek Pentateuch. Aejmelaesus concludes that, from a translation technical point of view, the books of Samuel do not seem to have been sacred at the time of their translation in the sense that the Torah or the Prophets were.⁶⁶

5.4. Conclusions

The categories of criteria (that is, external, internal, and intertextual factors) are partly hierarchical. Internal factors, that is, the inner claims to authority in the texts, are supplementary in relation to external and intertextual factors. Internal factors offer clues about the aims and agendas of the author, but nothing about how these claims to authority were received (accepted or rejected) by Jewish groups in the late Second Temple period. Internal factors are nonetheless worth discussing in relation to the question of whether a work that does not even claim to contain divine revelation can be considered Scripture.⁶⁷

Especially the manuscript discoveries at Qumran have offered a wide selection of textual evidence from late Second Temple Jewish writings. These finds have had a major impact particularly on the evidence available for developing, operating with, and refining the external factors. It is intriguing to pause and ponder how we would imagine the scriptural status of texts and traditions without the Qumran manuscript evidence and the implications that they present for the external factors and the scholarly need to refine these criteria. External factors provide helpful

65. Aejmelaesus, "When Did the Books of Samuel Become Scripture?," 264–66.

66. Aejmelaesus, "When Did the Books of Samuel Become Scripture?," 280–81.

67. If divine revelation and an authoritative implied author are seen as fundamental factors for scriptural status, the historical books, Qumran wisdom works, and the Hebrew Esther, which does not mention God at all, would not make the cut in the late Second Temple context. The Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls may also be evaluated with these factors in mind.

data and statistics, but they do not on their own provide a comprehensive picture of which traditions were considered scriptural by different Jewish groups in the late Second Temple period. Statistics based on external factors may be misleading in terms of how they are compiled, interpreted, and/or applied. This caution has been articulated already in earlier studies but not yet implemented widely enough. Special care is called for especially regarding the treatment of the number of copies of a work as a criterion for scriptural traditions in the late Second Temple period.

Intertextual factors provide clues as to how various earlier writings were received, valued, and utilized in new literary contexts. These criteria turn our focus more pointedly to the relationship between scriptural traditions and communities, how texts were received, and how the production of new ones was facilitated. When we investigate the various aspects of intertextual factors, we may conceptualize how scriptural traditions were treated and valued as source texts in relation to their use in new contexts through translation and literary devices such as quotations, allusions, and rewritings.

For a reliable evaluation of what was considered Scripture or scriptural tradition in the late Second Temple period, various combinations of the discussed criteria need to be applied. It is also important to note that the criteria indicate different aspects of scriptural status and are thus not mutually exclusive but rather sometimes intertwined. When investigating the available late Second Temple sources and the criteria in dialogue, it becomes apparent that a source can simultaneously be scriptural according to one criterion and not scriptural according to another. And as noted in this chapter, some criteria should be treated as secondary to others. It is therefore necessary to discuss not only the criteria but also what the criteria can supposedly tell us about the scriptural status of the source. Evaluating the sources with more than one criterion in mind should result in a more comprehensive understanding of their scriptural status because different criteria indicate different aspects of the phenomenon. When the challenges related to the criteria are recognized and critically evaluated in relation to the textual sources, it is possible to come to more reliable conclusions. If the question of scriptural status is approached through the idea of a scriptural index indicating how scriptural text or tradition was in late Second Temple Jewish context, the sources may be given varying values. There are, however, no absolute values, only relative ones. It seems clear that the question of scriptural status is not an either-or question.

In addition to studying individual texts, texts have been read in relation to wider collections and traditions. In scale models, texts and traditions

are evaluated in relation to each other, and the results reflect relative, not absolute, values. Even relative values may be helpful, but when comparing two or more witnesses with each other, fundamental reflections are necessary in terms of what exactly is being compared. The task and results are vastly different depending on whether texts, text types, text forms, collections, or wider traditions are compared. More reliable results that better reflect the ancient phenomena seem to be available when individual witnesses are analyzed in relation to wider traditions. The evaluation also needs to recognize the different contexts and the role of groups that, in the end and in their unique ways of usage, either accept and promote the internal claims for sacredness that are attested in the textual evidence or reject them. Acceptance and promotion may be attested by the number or copies, citations, other kinds of more subtle references, translations, and new interpretations of earlier traditions that result in parallel works and/or rewriting. The fundamental question is whether a community considered the earlier traditions relevant for itself in different contexts and under different circumstances. It is noteworthy that relevance may be attested in both positive and negative ways: both active acceptance and rejection are means of showing relevance, even though they are very different attitudes. In either case, a community's attitudes, beliefs, practices, and self-understanding are positioned in relation to earlier traditions.

In hindsight, another critique of the scale model is that, even though the scale is sliding, the placement of texts or traditions on it is static. The scale model does not work together with the phenomena and circumstances in which the scriptural status of texts, collections, and traditions changes over time, contexts, and for various groups.

As an alternative to scale models, a circular, zone-based model has been suggested.⁶⁸ This model seeks to identify core texts and traditions that were scriptural for a certain group and to supplement the core with works, collections, traditions, and other material that gradually move away in a circular fashion from the core and, hence, from a scriptural status that can be considered certain toward more uncertain cases. The benefit of this model is that there is room to move within the circular zones. This means

68. Pajunen, "Qumranin liikeen pyhät traditiot," utilizes a circular model to conceptualize which works formed the primary content of wider traditions, which works were secondary, and which were possible borderline cases for the Qumran movement in terms of their sacredness. Our idea of a potentially useful circular zone model builds upon this approach.

that two or more texts, collections, and traditions may be viewed to have a roughly similar standing without the need to position each of them in relation to each other. Furthermore, circular zones allow room for conceptualizing change in the status of a work over time, which makes this model more dynamic.

In order to properly take into account the groups that interact with texts and traditions and the viewpoints of reception in relation to the question of what was considered Scripture for various groups, it is crucial to illustrate separate circular zone models for each group. This being said, it is not possible or meaningful to try to ask what was thought to be Scripture merely at a certain period of time because the answer may only be properly provided in relation to specific groups. Therefore, the investigation needs to be made in relation to a specific group, and only after this will it be possible to start building a bigger picture of the situation in each time by comparing the reception of texts and traditions and the production of texts within various communities.

There is undoubtedly a link between the tradition that a literary work represents and the community that receives it and connects with it in some meaningful fashion. In certain cases, this connection is mediated through a figure that promotes a tradition or an interpretation in a text. Such figures can be, for example, patriarchal figures, the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran, or Jesus of Nazareth. What kind of a role do these sponsoring figures play in the process in which a group reflects its attitude toward the views, practices, and correct interpretations promoted in the textual work? In some cases, the sponsoring figure may make the promoted content more easily adoptable, whereas in other cases, the desire to resist the ideology promoted by a given figure may rather result in the rejection of the promoted content. These processes are related to power negotiations and should be studied in more detail in the future in order for us to better understand the processes of scripturalization and the multifaceted aspects and variables at play when the relationship between a textual work and a community is evaluated. Additionally, scriptural status may be observed also when a certain group or an individual in a position of authority, such as a priest, endorses a text. The problem is, however, that for many texts we do not have hard evidence of endorsement. Thus, the absence of endorsements does not automatically mean that the text was not perceived as scriptural.

A beneficial way to proceed in future studies could be to concentrate specifically on criteria related to rewriting and to various translations in

which power relations and dynamics are clearly in play. By concentrating on imagined and intended audiences and on receiving audiences—of which we might not know much—and their conceptions of Scripture in relation to the source traditions, we might gain new insight into the power dynamics involved in the processes of interpreting earlier traditions and producing new texts. This has been somewhat neglected in previous scholarship. As an example, the fact that a work was translated into Greek does not mean that it was considered Scripture by all communities with the knowledge of Greek. This might have been the aim and agenda of the translator, and the scriptural status of the translation might have been promoted, but it misses the mark without a community that places value in it and without the power relations between the text and its audience. In other words, there are three communities which play a key role: the community which produced the representation of tradition, the target community that the author had in mind, and the community that received the representation. It is crucial to further investigate how the power relations between these parties operate and what it means for a community to give legitimacy to a text or a tradition. Is one of these communities primary and the others secondary in the process of scripturalization? How do they interact, and what kinds of links connect these three communities separated by time, place, language, and culture? These and similar questions could help us better understand the true meaning of the statement that texts and traditions do not have authority in themselves. Rather, communities give them authority.

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Part 2

Case Studies in Methodological Encounters

6

Digital Humanities Meet Ancient Languages

Tero Alstola and Saana Svärd

6.1. Introduction

Since 2016, our research group in Helsinki has been working on combining qualitative and quantitative research in a novel way to study texts written in Akkadian, a language that is attested roughly between 2500 BCE and 50 CE in the ancient Near East. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the possibilities that these methods offer for the study of other corpora of ancient languages, particularly biblical corpora. Biblical texts have been studied intensively and extensively, but the methods we propose enable researchers to analyze relationships between words from a different perspective. The methods are particularly valuable for lexicographical studies, as they complement the more static view presented in traditional dictionaries. As pointed out by Aleksi Sahala, previous work combining language-technological methods and semantics in Akkadian lexemes is nonexistent.¹ Language-technological work in Akkadian has now yielded some promising results and is gaining traction in the research community.

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The origins of the research group reside in the recently concluded cross-disciplinary project “Semantic Domains in Akkadian Texts” (between September 2016 and August 2020). The rationale for this project was a realization that semantic research in Assyriology has relied almost exclusively on qualitative research on individual concepts. At the same time, in the field of language technology, myriads of interesting approaches have been developed to handle large amounts of textual data in order to gain new semantic insights. Therefore, we wanted to generate contextual semantic domains for Akkadian words by using methods from language technology. For Assyriology, the project has enabled a new point of departure for understanding words and concepts as networks of meaning. For language technology, dealing with difficult remains of Akkadian cuneiform has meant developing methods that will be useful for the analysis of other underresourced languages and small, fragmented corpora.

At the start of the project, much work and effort were dedicated to building the kind of linguistic data that our project could use. Our data come from the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus (Oracc), and we have further processed it to meet our needs.² In the second step, we tested different language-technological methods under the guidance of the PI of the project, Krister Lindén. This resulted in a proof-of-con-

Furthermore, we acknowledge FIN-CLARIN and the Language Bank of Finland for hosting our data and the content search system Korp. This chapter reports the results of work conducted by the two authors and other members of the Semantic Domains in Akkadian Texts project—Heidi Jauhiainen, Krister Lindén, and Aleksi Sahala—to whom we are profoundly indebted. The original research contributions of the project and its individual members are published in the papers cited in the present chapter. We thank Heidi Jauhiainen for generating the new PMI and fastText results in §§6.3.2 and 6.3.3. Furthermore, we thank Jauhiainen, Lindén, Sahala, and other ANEE members for valuable comments and suggestions. Finally, we are grateful to Albion M. Butters for revising the English language of the chapter. Work on this chapter was jointly conducted by both authors, and both authors contributed equally. In practice, for the most part Svärd wrote §§6.1, 6.2, and 6.3.1 and Alstola §§6.3.2, 6.3.3, and 6.3.4. The conclusions in §6.4 were jointly authored.

1. Aleksi Sahala, “Contributions to Computational Assyriology” (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2021), 31–72.

2. The Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/>. See, for example, Aleksi Sahala, Tero Alstola, and Heidi Jauhiainen, “Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, Korp Version, June 2021,” Language Bank of Finland, <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-2022031705>.

cept article that was published in 2018.³ The article demonstrated that semantic insights could be gained for Akkadian words with two language-technological approaches, Pointwise Mutual Information (PMI) and word vectors produced with word2vec. These methods can be used to study the semantic similarity of words, and they will be discussed in detail in §§6.3.2 and 6.3.3. In the next step, we explored named entities in our corpus, as well as different visualization methods. This resulted in our 2019 article in which we analyzed the textual cooccurrences of Mesopotamian deities as a divine network.⁴ We found that PMI can be used to weigh the strength of the ties between the deities, producing a network that better captures the connections between rarely attested divine beings.

During 2019–2020, the research output of the group became diversified. On the one hand, methodological development work continued with PMI and word vectors. This resulted in a novel method to deal with the effects of textual repetitiveness on PMI results⁵ and an article on using the fastText toolkit to create word vectors for Akkadian words.⁶ On the other hand, we applied our methods to study different aspects of the Akkadian language and Mesopotamian culture. Being interested in culturally loaded words and concepts, we undertook several case studies of words related to emotions and the senses (*fear*, *love*, and *seeing*).⁷

3. Saana Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains in Akkadian Texts,” in *CyberResearch on the Ancient Near East and Neighboring Regions: Case Studies on Archaeological Data, Objects, Texts, and Digital Archiving*, ed. Vanessa Bigot Juloux, Amy Rebecca Gansell, and Alessandro di Ludovico, DBS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 224–56.

4. Tero Alstola et al., “Aššur and His Friends: A Statistical Analysis of Neo-Assyrian Texts,” *JCS* 71 (2019): 159–80.

5. Aleksi Sahala and Krister Lindén, “Improving Word Association Measures in Repetitive Corpora with Context Similarity Weighting,” in *KDIR*, ed. Ana Fred and Joaquim Filipe, vol. 1 of *Proceedings of the 12th International Joint Conference on Knowledge Discovery, Knowledge Engineering and Knowledge Management; 2–4 November 2020* (New York: Springer, 2020), 48–58.

6. Heidi Jauhiainen and Tero Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis of Mesopotamian Divine Names,” in *The Ancient World Goes Digital: Case Studies on Archaeology, Texts, Online Publishing, Digital Archiving, and Preservation*, ed. Vanessa Bigot Juloux, Alessandro di Ludovico, and Sveta Matskevich, DBS 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 139–71.

7. Saana Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts: New Digital Perspectives on Lexical Semantics,” in *The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. Jaume Llop Raduà and Shih-Wei Hsu, CHANE 116 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 470–502; Tero Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches to Analyzing and Translating Emotion: What Is Love?,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Karen

Moreover, as relationships between the divine and humans were of great importance in Mesopotamian royal ideology and identity, we also pursued research on royal-divine cooccurrences of named entities.⁸ All these articles made methodological contributions and provided insights into the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia. All of our data, scripts, and methods have been openly available since the beginning of the project and many of the articles as well.⁹ The research has already had an impact, and we hope that other researchers will take up these ideas and datasets to use in their research.¹⁰

The project and its publications have relied on the so-called Helsinki method, a term coined by Niek Veldhuis in his presentation in August 2020.¹¹ This method means a deep interdisciplinary cooperation where the sum is greater than its parts. The cooperative approach started at the very beginning of the project, when the first research grant application was written by PI Krister Lindén (language technology), Saana Svärd (Assyriology), Tommi Jauhiainen (language technology), and Heidi Jauhiainen (Egyptology and data science). Later, Aleksi Sahala (Assyriology and language technology) and Tero Alstola (Assyriology) joined the research team. It was essential that all the researchers were very competent in their own fields of study and others could rely on that in the spirit of true collaboration.

Sonik and Ulrike Steinert (London: Routledge, 2022), 88–116; Aleksi Sahala and Saana Svärd, “Language Technology Approach to ‘Seeing’ in Akkadian,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Senses in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Kiersten Neumann and Allison Thomason (London: Routledge, 2022), 561–75.

8. Amy Rebecca Gansell et al., “Neo-Assyrian Imperial Religion Counts: A Quantitative Approach to the Affiliations of Kings and Queens with Their Gods and Goddesses,” *JANER* (forthcoming).

9. For datasets, see, e.g., Tero Alstola et al., dataset used for “Aššur and His Friends: A Statistical Analysis of Neo-Assyrian Texts,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.2620130; Saana Svärd et al., dataset used for “Fear in Akkadian Texts: New Digital Perspectives on Lexical Semantics,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.3634324.

10. Particularly important in this respect will be our comprehensive article outlining the use of digital methods for the study of lexical semantics, social groups, and material culture (Krister Lindén et al., “Social Group Identities and Semantic Domains” [in preparation]).

11. Niek Veldhuis, “Changing the Business of Assyriology: Data and Data Analysis” (keynote paper presented at the Virtual Workshop on Recent Developments in Digital Assyriology, Helsinki, Finland, 26–27 August 2020), 2–4.

In many ways, this spirit of collaboration had its roots in the way things were done at the Centre of Excellence in Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT), where Svärd and Alstola were members since its beginning in 2014. Even the very first presentation on the Semantic Domains project took place at an event that was related to CSTT.¹² The topic was also discussed at the 2018 Annual Meeting of CSTT,¹³ as well as in several team meetings over the years. CSTT therefore formed an important scholarly community, where ideas in development could be discussed. Furthermore, the connection of our research group with biblical studies has deeper roots as well. The core idea of conceptualizing semantic domains as groups of closely aligned lexemes was already present in Svärd's work in 2010, and its theoretical and methodological background was in biblical studies.¹⁴ Thus, the cross-disciplinary research community that existed in Helsinki before CSTT not only led to CSTT itself but also gave rise to the Semantic Domains research group.

Following this introduction, §6.2 will discuss the type of data and reprocessing required to use our quantitative methods. In §6.3, we introduce our methods, summarize the results of our methodological development work, and extrapolate what the results mean. Finally, §6.4 discusses our main results and points out some avenues of further work.

12. Saana Svärd, "Semantic Domains in Akkadian Texts" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Old Testament Studies: Epistemologies and Methods [OTSEM], Turku, Finland, 28–31 August 2016).

13. Tero Alstola and Saana Svärd, "Semantic Domains in Akkadian" (paper presented at the CSTT Annual Meeting, Lammi, Finland, 8–11 February 2018).

14. Saana Svärd, "Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire" (paper presented at the 56e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale—Time and History in the Ancient Near East, Barcelona, Spain, 26–30 July 2010), later published in Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, SAAS 23 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015). See also, e.g., John F. A. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research: New Methods of Defining Hebrew Words for Salvation*, SBT 2/24 (London: SCM, 1972), and Reinier de Blois, "Semantic Domains for Biblical Greek: Louw and Nida's Framework Evaluated from a Cognitive Perspective," in *Foundations for Syriac Lexicography III: Colloquia of the International Syriac Language Project*, ed. Janet Dyk and Wido van Peursen, PSL 4 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 265–78.

6.2. Data

The main data source for the Semantic Domains project has been the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, Oracc.¹⁵ Oracc is an umbrella project that hosts dozens of individual projects and provides a consistent platform for publishing primary sources and research related to the ancient Near East. The datasets used in the articles of the research group are not identical, but linguistically annotated textual data from Oracc have been the cornerstone for all of them. The Oracc data have been further processed to produce different datasets. Some of these are hosted by the Language Bank of Finland, a service provided by FIN-CLARIN, which in turn is part of a larger European CLARIN consortium.¹⁶ Our datasets in the Language Bank include Oracc in Korp 2017, Oracc in Korp 2019, and Oracc in Korp 2021.¹⁷ The Korp interface allows the user to perform simple and complex searches in the text corpora, study the results in their original context, and access the full primary texts in Oracc.

Our research group has focused on the Akkadian language, which is written in cuneiform signs. Akkadian texts are usually published both as drawn copies and as transliterations, where each sign is interpreted by an Assyriologist and written with the modern Latin script. Each cuneiform sign can be transliterated in several different ways, which means that publishing cuneiform documents in transliteration is already an interpretative scholarly task that requires considerable expertise. Because of the nature of the script and the nature of Akkadian as an inflecting language, each word can be written with various combinations of signs. If we had a very large corpus at our disposal, this would not necessarily be a problem, but our early experiments in 2017 showed that for Akkadian we need to work with lemmatized text. In other words, the different transliterations and inflections need to be tagged with the base form of the word (lemma). For example, three variations of writing *bābum*,

15. The Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/>.

16. The Language Bank of Finland, <https://www.kielipankki.fi/language-bank/>; CLARIN, <https://www.clarin.eu/>.

17. For all versions, see “Oracc,” Language Bank of Finland, <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-2019111601>. The latest version is Sahala, Alstola, and Jauhiainen, “Oracc, Korp Version, June 2021.”

“gate,” in Akkadian are (1) logographically KÁ, (2) syllabically *ba-bu-ú*, and (3) syllabically in the status constructus form *ba-ab*. All of these can be tagged with the base form of the word, *bābum*. An example from the English language would be tagging the words “sing,” “sang,” and “sung” with one lemma “to sing.”

Furthermore, we processed the data to reduce irrelevant information as much as possible. We grouped together some general categories, such as numerals and personal names (sometimes also divine names and place names), under the lemmas “numeral,” “person,” and the like. For some of our research, we needed to harmonize our data, which required a lot of work as well. Oracc has texts from various projects, annotated by dozens of individuals. Therefore, despite Oracc’s guidelines, the same name was often written in many different ways (e.g., the goddess Ištar was also lemmatized as Issar and IŠŠAR). These were standardized with the same lemma for some of our datasets. After some experimentation, we further refined the data, deciding to keep only the words that had been annotated as nouns, verbs, or adjectives. All other words (e.g., prepositions) were replaced with an underscore (“_”). Here we have outlined the main steps of our process, although there are some variations for different research questions.¹⁸

We have tested different approaches to preprocessing our data and observed that more extensive preprocessing may not lead to better results. For example, in our article on *fear* words, we developed a strategy to enrich the data by treating a verb and its derivatives (nouns and adjectives) as one word. This can be fruitful, but the final results of the article suggest that it may not be necessary to process data in that way. At least in this case, the verbs and their derivatives often had different semantic fields, which meant that it was necessary to examine them separately. We also separated homonyms for the words of interest, which proved to be relevant for the results only if the word of interest had many or frequent

18. For the exact processes of data handling, see the relevant sections in these articles: Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 227–29; Alstola et al., “Aššur and His Friends,” 162–65; Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 477–79; Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches,” 90–91. See also the three datasets available with readme files: Alstola et al., dataset used for “Aššur and His Friends”; Svärd et al., dataset used for “Fear in Akkadian Texts”; Tero Alstola et al., dataset used for “Digital Approaches to Analyzing and Translating Emotion: What Is Love?,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.5861579.

homonyms.¹⁹ At the same time, in our article on *love* words, we found that by dividing our target words into different genres (defined by the metadata from Oracc), we were able to get a more nuanced understanding of a word in different contexts.²⁰

Language datasets for ancient languages have some features that pose challenges for digital methods. First, these datasets are relatively small in comparison to the datasets of hundreds of millions or billions of words that can be collected online for widely used modern languages. Our dataset of Akkadian texts has less than two million words, although the number of texts available in Oracc is constantly growing. As most of the texts in Oracc have been linguistically annotated, they are well suited for computational analysis. In heavily inflecting languages such as ancient Akkadian, Hebrew, or Greek, it is often necessary to use the dictionary forms of words (lemmas) in analysis. The total number of digitized Akkadian texts far exceeds two million words, but because many of these texts are not annotated, they cannot be analyzed with our tools and methods. The situation differs in the neighboring fields. There are linguistically annotated corpora available in both biblical studies and classics, but the sizes of their corpora are dramatically different. The Hebrew Bible contains only a little over 300,000 words and the Greek New Testament circa 140,000 words, and there are several linguistically annotated corpora available.²¹ There are substantially larger digital datasets for ancient Greek and Latin. For example, the datasets available through the Scaife Viewer contain some 31 million words of Greek and 17 million words of Latin.²² These texts are linguistically annotated or are in the process of being annotated.

19. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 495–96.

20. Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches.”

21. See, for example, W. T. van Peursen, C. Sikkels, and D. Roorda, “Hebrew Text Database ETCBC4b,” DANS, doi:10.17026/dans-z6y-skyh; Tyndale House, “STEP Bible,” <https://www.stepbible.org/>. The numbers are counted from the open data repository of Tyndale House, “STEP Bible.”

22. The Scaife Viewer, <https://scaife.perseus.org/>, accessed 2 December 2021. The Scaife Viewer is part of the Open Greek and Latin Project (<https://opengreekandlatin.org/>). The listing at <https://scaife.perseus.org/about/> provides links to the GitHub repositories that contain the annotated datasets.

6.3. Main Tools and Results

6.3.1. Introduction to Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Semantic Domains

The eminent Assyriologist Benno Landsberger is often quoted for his landmark publication from 1926, which demanded that the Mesopotamian culture should be understood as an independent entity, on its own terms. He writes that if one is approaching “the alien mind from a fixed system of conceptual referents ... I could always only find again in my object what I already had within my own perspective.”²³ Landsberger’s view connects to a larger (and much later) discussion in the social sciences. In general, concepts that are foreign to the culture that is being researched (etic concepts) do not necessarily have as much explanatory power as concepts that have a connection to the culture in question (emic concepts).²⁴ For example, even when a scholar explains and defines his use of an etic term like *harem*, it is methodologically more sound to build on emic concepts like *bēt isāti* (literally translated as “house of women”), which the speakers of Akkadian themselves used. Naturally, the term *bēt isāti* in itself is not an explanation of the social institution that the term *bēt isāti* represents. After having gathered emic data, the scholar analyzes them in order to make sense of the data in modern context, usually by using an etic approach. For example, one can gather and read all the text attestations of *bēt isāti* (emic concept) and then explain and analyze the attestations by using theories of seclusion (etic concepts). Concepts that are not native to the culture that is being researched can still be helpful heuristic tools for modern research. Such an etic approach has been successfully used in studies on genre and authorship in Mesopotamia, for instance.²⁵ However, if the evidence

23. The original idea was first published in 1926, but the English translation appears in Benno Landsberger, *The Conceptual Autonomy of the Babylonian World*, trans. Thorkild Jacobsen, Benjamin R. Foster, and Heinrich von Siebenthal, MANE 1.4 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1976), 60; trans. of “Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt: Ein Vortrag,” *Islamica* 2.3 (1926): 355–72.

24. For anthropology, see, e.g., Thomas H. Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed., Anthropology, Culture and Society (London: Pluto, 2010).

25. See Benjamin R. Foster, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period*, GMTR 2 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 3; Charles Halton and Saana Svård, *Women’s Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Anthology of the Earliest Female Authors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 29–30.

is forced into a modern mold (e.g., equating *bēt isāti* with the etic term “harem”), there is a danger of anachronistic explanations and distortion of the evidence.

Our research group is interested in the meaning of words from an emic point of view.²⁶ By using language-technological methods, we create groups of words that are tied together with ties of varying strengths and depicted graphically as networks. Such lexical networks assist the scholar in perceiving the meaning of an individual word as constructed in its relationship to other words. By analyzing these emic connections, that is, the ties embedded in the Akkadian language itself, the researchers can analyze and explain the meaning of the word in question in modern terms but also from an analytic perspective of the long-dead Akkadian-language speakers. Additionally, the emic and etic perspectives are more fruitfully thought of as a continuum, rather than a clear-cut dichotomy. In the process of constructing meaning, the scholar slides between these two frames.²⁷

In addition to the emic-etic continuum, the background for our research is also connected to the topic of linguistic relativism and the relationship between thought and language. To what degree are individual languages autonomous cognitive systems and to what degree are they connected to human biology and evolution? The debate is ongoing, but we subscribe to the largely accepted view that although certain biological factors influence language in myriad ways, social and cultural factors play the dominant role in the construction of meaning for words.²⁸ This is the

26. Nicholas Evans, “Semantic Typology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Typology*, ed. Jae Jung Song (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 504–33. See particularly pages 508–11 for a discussion on the meaning of emic and etic characterizations for semantic typology.

27. An interesting and useful analytical model that incorporates other dimensions in addition to the emic-etic continuum is offered by Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Nancy L. Leech, and Kathleen M. T. Collins, “Toward a New Era for Conducting Mixed Analyses: The Role of Quantitative Dominant and Qualitative Dominant Crossover Mixed Analyses,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Innovation in Social Research Methods*, ed. Malcolm Williams and W. Paul Vogt (London: SAGE, 2011), 353–84, esp. 367–69.

28. For a general introduction, see, for example, Dirk Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For a recent comprehensive discussion regarding biolinguistic and usage-based approaches to language evolution, see Michael Pleyer and Stefan Hartmann, “Constructing a Consensus on Language

basis for our argument that the emic perspective on lexical semantics in Akkadian has interpretative value.

Our research demonstrates that gaining understanding of lexical semantics from the point of view of ancient native speakers is greatly facilitated by the quantitative analysis of word cooccurrence patterns. Traditional Assyriological lexical semantic studies are based on researchers' excellent grasp of the language and the interpretations they make based on it. By employing the concepts of paradigmatic and syntagmatic semantic fields, and furthermore by defining these fields with the methods of corpus linguistics, we propose that we can complement this kind of qualitative and often almost intuitive research process with quantitative information on the emic lexical semantics of Akkadian. When the interpretations of the researcher are based on quantitative analysis, the interpretative process becomes more transparent and better grounded. We suggest that such quantitative analysis could be fruitful for the study of biblical texts as well.²⁹

The approach we adopt here has its roots in the classic work of Jost Trier and the Saussurean distinction commonly made between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in the meaning of words.³⁰ Semantically, there is a *paradigmatic* connection between words that belong to the same general category. For example, in English, the concept "chair" belongs to the semantic domain "furniture," together with "tables" and "beds." At the same time, there is a *syntagmatic* semantic connection between words that cooccur frequently (e.g., "pitch black"). For example, the word "chair"

Evolution? Convergences and Differences Between Biolinguistic and Usage-Based Approaches," *Front. Psychol.* 10 (2019): 2537.

29. See also the article "Rethinking Textual Criticism and Its Relation to Literary Criticism" in this volume by Anneli Aejmelaeus and Juha Pakkala. They discuss the subjectivity of research and how the "evidential paradigm" (aiming to infer the causes from the effects) can be applied to textual studies of biblical literature. We regard the evidential paradigm as relevant for the present chapter as well. In a way, we attempt to infer "causes" (reconstructing cognitive categories that may have existed in the minds of the language users) from innumerable "effects" (e.g., repeated cooccurrence patterns between words) embedded in Mesopotamian texts.

30. Jost Trier, *Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 13. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 of *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes: Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1931). These ideas originally reached our research group via biblical studies, more specifically the work of Reinier de Blois; see de Blois, "Semantic Domains for Biblical Greek."

appears in many different contexts, with differing connotations. In the well-known words of linguist J. R. Firth already in the 1950s: “You shall know a word by the company it keeps.”³¹ In the semantic domain “home,” the word “chair” could be associated syntagmatically with words like “comfortable” and “family,” as, for example, in the following sentence: “This comfortable chair is the favorite of the whole family.” At the same time, within the domain “commerce,” “chair” can be associated with “money,” “discount,” or “store.” Therefore, in addition to “chair” belonging to the paradigmatic semantic category “furniture,” it belongs to a multitude of syntagmatic semantic categories.³²

Our research group has used methods of language technology to trace paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in a large corpus of Akkadian texts.³³ Our work has provided advanced tools for Assyriologists to reflect on the semantic domains of the words. The following sections (6.3.2, 6.3.3, and 6.3.4) explain how we have tested and further developed several language-technological tools and methods, expecting that Pointwise Mutual Information is able to capture the nuances of syntagmatic relations and word2vec and fastText are able to explore paradigmatic relations. Our quantitative results were compared with the results of earlier Assyriological inquiries into semantic domains (explored via the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*).³⁴ In our later work, our approaches were developed further. The visualization of lexemes and their relationships as linguistic networks and the interpretation of the quantitative results in a hermeneutic feedback loop proved to be the most fruitful approach for analyzing semantic domains created with our methods.

31. J. R. Firth, “A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory, 1930–55,” in *Studies in Linguistic Analysis*, ed. J. R. Firth (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 11.

32. For a good introduction to lexical semantics and paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, see Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 53–60. See also Alfio Strapparava and Carlo Glozozzo, *Semantic Domains in Computational Linguistics* (New York: Springer, 2009), 14–19. For a case study comparing syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, see Wanying Chiu and Kun Lu, “Paradigmatic Relations and Syntagmatic Relations: How Are They Related?,” *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 52 (2015): 1–4.

33. The approach was first introduced in Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 229–32.

34. Martha T. Roth et al., eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956–2010).

6.3.2. Analyzing Syntagmatic Relationships with Pointwise Mutual Information (PMI)

Words that share syntagmatic relationships tend to be used together or appear in the same context.³⁵ These can be compound words or idioms, such as “swimming pool” or “miss the boat,” or words that relate to the same semantic context, such as the words “eat,” “delicious,” and “restaurant” in the sentence “We ate a delicious meal in a cozy restaurant.” At the same time, many words are hardly ever used in the same context. Therefore, by analyzing how often two words cooccur in a corpus, it is possible to learn about the syntagmatic relationships between them.

Simply counting the number of times two words cooccur next to each other would not be very informative. First, only compound words, set phrases, and constructions such as the verb and direct object in English are likely to be found next to each other in text. In the sentence “We ate a delicious meal in a cozy restaurant,” the words “ate” and “restaurant” belong to the same context, but they are separated by six other words in the sentence. Allowing only one or two other words to appear between the words of interest, one finds compounds and set phrases, but allowing a larger number of words to occur in between shows syntagmatic relationships in a wider semantic context. The number of words from word A up to word B, including both A and B, is called a window. Our results are significantly different if we look for words cooccurring in a window of three words or a window of ten words.

Second, if one only counts the raw number of cooccurrences of two words, the results between high-frequency and low-frequency words are not comparable. Although the rare word A would be almost always attested with the word B in the corpus, the frequent word C might cooccur more often with B although there is no significant relationship between B and C. This problem can be avoided by comparing the actual number of cooccurrences in our corpus to the expected number of cooccurrences if the words of the corpus were in random order. If there is a real syntagmatic relationship between two words, they should cooccur more often than is statistically probable. A measure called Pointwise Mutual Infor-

35. See Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 53–60; Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 83–88, with additional literature cited there.

mation (PMI) uses this intuitive approach to distinguish real collocations from random cooccurrences.³⁶

It is well known that the basic PMI measure assigns disproportionately large scores to collocations of two rare words.³⁷ As our corpus comprises a small group of common words and a bulk of rare words, the results of the basic PMI measure would be too strongly geared toward the rare words in our dataset. One option is to use a threshold that discards the collocations that occur less than a given number of times in our dataset. However, this is not an optimal solution in a dataset that primarily consists of rare words, because even low thresholds would discard most cooccurrences. We have therefore used two different variants of PMI that are designed to solve the low-frequency bias. In our first article, we used a measure called normalized PMI (NPMI), but after learning that the measures belonging to the PMI^k family solve the bias more successfully, we have used PMI^2 and its derivative PPMI^2 (positive PMI^2) in our other articles.³⁸ They both handle the low-frequency bias in the same manner, but the negative scores given by PMI^2 (between $-\infty$ and 0) caused problems for the Gephi

36. Kenneth W. Church and Patrick Hanks, “Word Association Norms, Mutual Information, and Lexicography,” *CL* 16 (1990): 22–29. See also Sahala and Svärd, “Language Technology Approach to ‘Seeing’ in Akkadian.”

37. Christopher D. Manning and Hinrich Schütze, *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 178–82.

38. NPMI: Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 238–46; Gerlof Bouma, “Normalized (Pointwise) Mutual Information in Collocation Extraction,” in *Von der Form zur Bedeutung: Texte automatisch verarbeiten / From Form to Meaning: Processing Texts Automatically; Proceedings of the Biennial GSCL Conference 2009*, ed. Christian Chiarcos, Richard Eckart de Castilho, and Manfred Stede (Tübingen: Narr, 2009), 31–40. PMI^k : François Role and Mohamed Nadif, “Handling the Impact of Low Frequency Events on Co-occurrence Based Measures of Word Similarity: A Case Study of Pointwise Mutual Information,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Information Retrieval; Paris, France, 26–29 October 2011*, ed. Joaquim Filipe and Ana Fred (Setúbal, Portugal: SciTePress, 2011), 226–31. PMI^2 : Alstola et al., “Aššur and His Friends,” 167; Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches,” 92–93; Sahala and Svärd, “Language Technology Approach to ‘Seeing’ in Akkadian,” 564–65; Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 479–82. The PMI^k family was introduced in Béatrice Daille, “Approche mixte pour l’extraction automatique de terminologie: Statistique lexicale et filtres linguistiques” (PhD diss., Université Paris 7, 1994). PPMI^2 corresponds to the measure called PPMI in Role and Nadif, “Handling the Impact,” but we prefer to use the name PPMI^2 to make the relationship between PMI^2 and PPMI^2 explicit and avoid confusion with other measures called PPMI.

software we use to analyze and visualize collocations as word networks. Thus, the positive values given by PPMI² (between 0 and 1) are better suited for our purposes.

Another challenge posed by the Akkadian dataset is its repetitiveness. Kings repeat certain passages in their inscriptions verbatim, and many scholarly text genres use fixed expressions again and again. This repetitiveness has a significant impact on the PMI results in a dataset such as ours, but the aforementioned variants of the PMI measure cannot duly take this into account. Members of our research group have developed a method (context similarity weighting) to assign penalties to the words appearing in repeated contexts, improving the quality of PMI results in our corpus.³⁹ Aleksi Sahala has been primarily responsible for carrying out research on PMI in our group, and all the PMI measures discussed in this chapter can be calculated using his open-source Pmizer tool.⁴⁰

Overall, we always have been content with the PMI results, as they have made sense from the Akkadian perspective and displayed words that can be expected to appear in the same context. For example, our PMI results have shown that the gods are said to love (*râmu*) the king's priesthood (*šangûtu*) and offerings (*zîbu*) in royal inscriptions; alternatively, in Akkadian love literature, the word *râmu* is associated with words relating to sexual joy and lovemaking, such as *ših̄tu*, "laughter," and *dādu*, "darling."⁴¹ Our development work has improved the usability and performance of the method in small corpora even further.

In table 1, we compare the results of the NPMI measure we used in our 2018 article to the results of the PPMI² measure with context similarity weighting that we have employed in our most recent articles.⁴² We extract the ten best collocates for the words *sisû*, "horse," *qabû*, "to say," and *danānu*, "to be(come) strong," using the dataset from the 2018 article. These words are good candidates for testing our methods, because they are common in Akkadian texts but quite different from each other. The NPMI

39. Sahala and Lindén, "Improving Word Association Measures."

40. Aleksi Sahala, "Pmizer: A Tool for Calculating Word Association Measures," GitHub, <https://github.com/asahala/Pmizer>.

41. Alstola et al., "Digital Approaches."

42. The parameters used for NPMI and the process of calculating the average scores are explained in Svärd et al., "Semantic Domains," 239–41. The parameters used for PPMI² are described in Alstola et al., "Digital Approaches," 92–93 and Alstola et al., dataset used for "Digital Approaches."

results are taken from our 2018 article, and the PPMI² results were calculated from the same data in 2021. Our final NPMI scores are weighted averages of the NPMI scores calculated using windows of 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 words, and frequency thresholds of 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 cooccurrences, while the PPMI² results were calculated using a window of 10 words and frequency thresholds of 2 for collocations and 5 for individual words in the dataset.

The PPMI² results for *sisû* are surprisingly similar to the NPMI results in table 1, but the results for *qabû* and *danānu* differ more. The PPMI² measure with context similarity weighting performs better with *qabû*, as all the words in the top-ten list can be expected to typically cooccur with the target word.⁴³ At the same time, the NPMI results contain the words *niṣṣak*, “deed” (in Sumerian) and *bibbulu*, “flood,” which are not obvious collocates of the Akkadian word *qabû*, “to say.” The results for *danānu* are clearly affected by the frequency thresholds we use. While all the top-ten PPMI² collocates for *sisû* and *qabû* cooccur more than ten times with the target word, the results for *danānu* contain some less frequent collocations. This affects our results in two ways. On the one hand, some rare but relevant collocates, such as *kuppû*, “snow,” and *kisû*, “footing,” appear in the results, but, on the other hand, some rare and less relevant words, such as *šurqu*, “theft,” and *šitmurû*, “very wild,” are attested as well. Using a threshold of ten cooccurrences produces fairly similar results to NPMI.

The procedure for producing the NPMI collocate lists was rather complicated, but our current tools and methods can produce the same or better results in a simpler way. The comparison of the NPMI and PPMI² results also corroborates our previous finding that relatively small windows provide better results than wider windows.⁴⁴ Finally, the PPMI² measure with context similarity weighting can produce tangible results with low frequency thresholds, allowing a fine-grained analysis of small textual datasets. A scholar starting a new analysis process with a new

43. We have previously noticed that adverbs and prepositions have a tendency to figure prominently in our results. Because this obscures the semantic domains of our target words, we have replaced adverbs and prepositions with an underscore in our dataset (Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 228). We have not, however, replaced nouns that can be used prepositionally in Akkadian, and thus the words *muhhu*, *pānu*, and *libbu* feature in the PPMI² results for *qabû*.

44. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 243–44; Alstola et al., “Aššur and His Friends,” 169.

corpus is advised to test different frequency thresholds in order to achieve optimal results, as these are greatly affected by the size and nature of the dataset in question.

Table 1 shows that our PMI methods primarily indicate syntagmatic relationships between lexemes, but words from the same paradigmatic category are especially present in the results for *sisû*, “horse.” This is explained by the fact that horses are very frequently mentioned in lists together with other equids and pack animals.⁴⁵ The same view emerges from our other articles: PMI excels in finding syntagmatic relationships, but it can also highlight the paradigmatic dimension in contexts like lists and poetry, in which the ancient scribes themselves grouped words paradigmatically for practical purposes or emphasis.

<i>sisû</i> , “horse” (686 attestations)	
Normalized PMI (NPMI)	Positive PMI ² (PPMI ²) with context similarity weighting
<i>Kusaya</i> , “Kushite”	<i>Kusaya</i> , “Kushite”
<i>pēthallu</i> , “riding horse”	<i>pēthallu</i> , “riding horse”
<i>parû</i> , “mule”	<i>sisû</i> , “horse”
<i>Mesaya</i> , “Mesaeen”	<i>kūdanu</i> , “mule”
<i>kūdanu</i> , “mule”	<i>Mesaya</i> , “Mesaeen”
<i>udru</i> , “Bactrian camel”	<i>gimru</i> , “totality”
<i>sisû</i> , “horse”	<i>parû</i> , “mule”
<i>ṣēnu</i> , “flock”	<i>nīru</i> , “yoke”
<i>gammalu</i> , “camel”	<i>narkabtu</i> , “chariot”
<i>nību</i> , “naming”	<i>ṣēnu</i> , “flock”
<i>qabû</i> , “to say” (2,353 attestations)	
NPMI	PPMI ² with context similarity weighting
<i>niṣāk</i> , “deed”	<i>qabû</i> , “to say”
<i>naqbītu</i> , “utterance”	<i>šarru</i> , “king”
<i>teslītu</i> , “appeal”	<i>bēlu</i> , “lord”
<i>bibbulu</i> , “flood”	<i>alāku</i> , “to go”

45. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 242–43. References to (different types of) horses in lists explain why *sisû* cooccurs with itself in our results in table 1.

<i>ibru</i> , “friend”	<i>muhhu</i> , “skull” (used prepositionally)
<i>qabû</i> , “to say”	<i>awātu</i> , “word”
<i>apālu</i> , “to pay”	<i>pānu</i> , “front” (used prepositionally)
<i>awātu</i> , “word”	<i>teslītu</i> , “appeal”
<i>zakāru</i> , “to speak”	<i>epēšu</i> , “to do”
<i>šālu</i> , “to ask”	<i>libbu</i> , “inner body” (used prepositionally)
<i>danānu</i> , “to be(come) strong” (221 attestations)	
NPMI	PPMI ² with context similarity weighting
<i>šupku</i> , “foundation”	<i>šupku</i> , “foundation”
<i>birtūtu</i> , “function of fort”	<i>birtūtu</i> , “function as fort”
<i>enēšu</i> , “to be(come) weak”	<i>kuppû</i> , “snow”
<i>takālu</i> , “to trust”	<i>lītu</i> , “victory”
<i>pīlu</i> , “limestone”	<i>kisû</i> , “footing”
<i>ewû</i> , “to become”	<i>kubukku</i> , “strength”
<i>epištu</i> , “deed”	<i>enēšu</i> , “to be(come) weak”
<i>temmēnu</i> , “foundation”	<i>šurqu</i> , “theft”
<i>lītu</i> , “victory”	<i>šitmuru</i> , “very wild”
<i>mušarû</i> , “(royal) inscription”	<i>emūqu</i> , “strength”

Table 1. The ten best collocates for the words *sisû*, “horse,” *qabû*, “to say,” and *danānu*, “to be(come) strong,” using the NPMI measure and the PPMI² measure with context similarity weighting. For an explanation of these measures, see above in §6.3.2. Homonyms have not been separated; thus, for example, the word *šālu* includes the verbs “to ask” and “to rejoice.” The translations primarily follow *CDA* but indicate the meaning that makes the most sense in the context of the results.

6.3.3. Analyzing Paradigmatic Relationships with Word2vec and FastText

Words that share a paradigmatic relationship do not necessarily cooccur in the same context but can occupy the same place in a sentence.⁴⁶ There is a paradigmatic relationship between the words “to be scared,” “to be afraid,” and “to be frightened,” and they can all be used to substitute for the expression “to be terrified” in the English sentence “The king was terrified

46. See Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, 53–60; Chandler, *Semiotics*, 83–88, with further literature.

when he heard that the enemy troops were approaching the capital.” In practice, words sharing a paradigmatic relationship are attested in similar contexts and are likely to cooccur with the same words. Word similarity in paradigmatic contexts can thus be studied by analyzing the words that cooccur with our words of interest.⁴⁷

In computational linguistics, cooccurring words can be used to characterize a target word numerically.⁴⁸ As with PMI above, words cooccurring in the same context are studied within a specific window. In a corpus, some words cooccur regularly, whereas most words do so very rarely or never. If we study each attestation of a word in a corpus, we can produce a list that includes all the other words in the corpus and the number of their cooccurrences with the target word. Most words have the value zero, as they never occur with the target word. If we produce such lists for every word in the corpus and sort the lists so that each word occupies the same position in each list, we notice that each word has its own unique set of collocates and their frequencies, although sets of certain words resemble each other much more than others.

It is possible to compare the numerical lists of cooccurrence frequencies to each other without including information about the words to which these numbers correspond. If two words are regularly attested in similar contexts with the same collocates, their lists of numbers resemble each other. As there are usually thousands of different words in a corpus, these lists of numbers cannot be compared to each other manually. However, they can be analyzed mathematically as vectors. Each number in a list corresponds to a coordinate in a vector space that has as many dimensions as there are different words in the corpus. The words that are attested with the same collocates receive similar coordinates and thus have similar vectors. The words represented by similar vectors, in turn, should be similar from a paradigmatic perspective.

Word vectors created in this way are somewhat impractical because they may have tens of thousands of dimensions but their coordinates in most dimensions are zero. Consequently, researchers in language technology have developed methods and tools for producing word vectors (or

47. See, e.g., Firth, “Synopsis of Linguistic Theory.”

48. This methodological overview is based on Daniel Jurafsky and James H. Martin, *Speech and Language Processing: An Introduction to Natural Language Processing, Computational Linguistics, and Speech Recognition*, 3rd ed. draft of 30 December 2020, tinyurl.com/SBL03116a. See also Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis.”

word embeddings) that have fewer dimensions but can still represent word similarities accurately. We have used two such tools, word2vec and fastText, to produce word vectors from Akkadian texts. FastText is a more sophisticated version of word2vec, as it takes subword information into account by dividing a word into shorter sequences of characters during the training process.⁴⁹ This allows fastText to better handle inflecting languages and words that are not attested in the training data. Both tools use information on word cooccurrences in a specific window as their input data, and they can be trained to guess a target word from context words or context words from a target word. During the training process, the tools produce word vectors. The user can define the dimensionality of these vectors, normally having a range of a few hundred.

In a large corpus of hundreds of millions or billions of words, these vectors can capture semantic nuances very accurately, and they can be analyzed like other vectors in a vector space. For example, word vectors can be added to and subtracted from each other, and these operations lead to semantically meaningful results. If one subtracts the vector for *man* from the vector for *king* and adds the vector for *woman*, the resulting vector is very close to the vector for *queen* in the English language.⁵⁰ We can display a similar result for the deities Marduk, Zarpanītu, Nabû, and Tašmētu in Akkadian (fig. 1).⁵¹

The similarity between two words can be analyzed by calculating the cosine of the angle between their word vectors: the closer the value is to 1, the more similarly oriented the vectors are and the more similarly the words

49. Word2vec: Tomas Mikolov et al., “Efficient Estimation of Word Representations in Vector Space” (paper presented at the International Conference on Learning Representations [ICLR] 2013, workshop track, Scottsdale, AZ, 2–4 May 2013); Tomas Mikolov et al., “Distributed Representations of Words and Phrases and Their Compositionality,” in *Proceedings of the 26th International Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems*, ed. C. J. C. Burges et al. (Red Hook, NY: Curran, 2013), 3111–19. FastText: Piotr Bojanowski et al., “Enriching Word Vectors with Subword Information,” *TACL* 5 (2017): 135–46.

50. Tomas Mikolov, Wen-tau Yih, and Geoffrey Zweig, “Linguistic Regularities in Continuous Space Word Representations,” in *Proceedings of the 2013 Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics: Human Language Technologies*, ed. Lucy Vanderwende, Hal Daumé III, and Katrin Kirchhoff (Stroudsburg, PA: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2013), 746–51.

51. Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis,” 154–56.

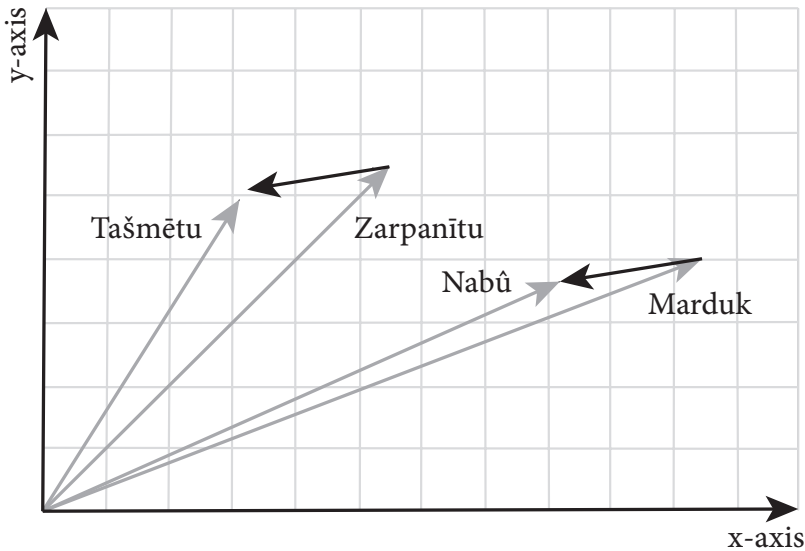


Fig. 1. A simplified example of word vectors in a two-dimensional vector space. The figure shows the vectors for the god Marduk and his wife Zarpanītu and the god Nabû and his wife Tašmētu. If one subtracts the vector for Marduk from the vector for Nabû and adds the vector for Zarpanītu, the resulting vector is close to the vector for Tašmētu.

are used.⁵² With word2vec and fastText, the user can query for the most similar vectors to a target vector, and the tools provide a list of word vectors with the highest cosines (or, to use another term, cosine similarities).

To achieve good performance, word2vec and fastText do not count each attestation of a word in the corpus but use only a sample to create a probabilistic model of the corpus as a whole. These tools achieve excellent results in large digital datasets of modern languages, and fastText has also been shown to perform well with a relatively small amount of training data.⁵³ One of the main aims of our project was to explore the applicability of these tools to a small and repetitive dataset of Akkadian texts and discover ways to improve our results.

52. Jurafsky and Martin, *Speech and Language Processing*, ch. 6.

53. Mikolov et al., “Efficient Estimation”; Bojanowski et al., “Enriching Word Vectors.”

We started our project in 2016 by experimenting with word2vec.⁵⁴ The results of word2vec seemed to depict both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, and we wanted to see if fastText would fare better with our small corpus. We have focused on using fastText and testing different parameters since 2018, but despite our development work, the current setup of fastText only slightly outperforms the setup of word2vec we used in 2016. This probably results from the fact that both word2vec and fastText rely on the same basic methodology, and the challenges of our small Akkadian dataset are the same for both tools. To review the performance of the two tools, we created lists of the ten most similar words to *sisû*, “horse,” *qabû*, “to say,” and *danānu*, “to be(come) strong,” using word2vec and fastText (table 2). The word2vec results were published by Svärd et al. in 2018, and the fastText results were generated from the same dataset in 2021.⁵⁵

<i>sisû</i> , “horse” (686 attestations)	
word2vec	fastText
<i>kūdanu</i> , “mule”	<i>kūdanu</i> , “mule”
<i>šumbu</i> , “wheel”	<i>pēthallu</i> , “riding horse”
<i>parû</i> , “mule”	<i>Mesaya</i> , “Mesaeen”
<i>gammalu</i> , “camel”	<i>Kusaya</i> , “Kushite”
<i>urdu</i> , “Bactrian camel”	<i>narkabtu</i> , “chariot”
<i>narkabtu</i> , “chariot”	<i>parû</i> , “mule”
<i>šēnu</i> , “flock”	<i>šēnu</i> , “flock”
<i>namrāšu</i> , “hardship”	<i>nāgir ēkalli</i> , “palace herald”
<i>Kusaya</i> , “Kushite”	<i>ina irti</i> , “opposite”
<i>mānu</i> , “counting”	<i>gammalu</i> , “camel”
<i>qabû</i> , “to say” (2,353 attestations)	
word2vec	fastText
<i>magāru</i> , “to consent”	<i>šālu</i> , “to ask”
<i>awātu</i> , “word”	<i>pānu</i> , “front”

54. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 246–51.

55. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 246–51. The parameters used for fastText are described in Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis,” 147–49.

<i>wadû</i> , “to know”	<i>wadû</i> , “to know”
<i>hasâsu</i> , “to be(come) conscious”	<i>šemû</i> , “to hear”
<i>kamsu</i> , “gathered”	<i>alâku</i> , “to go”
<i>šâlu</i> , “to ask”	<i>wabâlu</i> , “to carry”
<i>šipirtu</i> , “message”	<i>awâtu</i> , “word”
<i>mîtu</i> , “dead”	<i>šapâru</i> , “to send”
<i>hibiltu</i> , “wrongdoing”	<i>ṭêmu</i> , “(fore)thought”
<i>abâku</i> , “to overturn”	<i>ramânu</i> , “self”

danânu, “to be(come) strong” (221 attestations)

word2vec	fastText
<i>gašru</i> , “strong”	<i>kišittu</i> , “achievement”
<i>šeriktu</i> , “present”	<i>epištu</i> , “deed”
<i>ilûtu</i> , “divinity”	<i>šêru</i> , “back”
<i>lîtu</i> , “victory”	<i>rabû</i> , “to be(come) big”
<i>qurdu</i> , “warriorhood”	<i>dûru</i> , “city wall”
<i>liptu</i> , “undertaking”	<i>qarrādûtu</i> , “heroism”
<i>dandannu</i> , “all-powerful”	<i>šaṭâru</i> , “to write”
<i>râ'imu</i> , “loving”	<i>šîtru</i> , “(piece of) writing”
<i>agû</i> , “crown”	<i>nabû</i> , “to name”
<i>rimîtu</i> , “residence”	<i>lîtu</i> , “victory”

Table 2. The ten most similar words to *sisû*, “horse,” *qabû*, “to say,” and *danânu*, “to be(come) strong,” according to word2vec and fastText. Homonyms have not been separated; thus, for example, the word *šâlu* includes the verbs “to ask” and “to rejoice.” The translations primarily follow CDA but indicate the meaning that makes the most sense in the context of the results.

The word2vec and fastText results for the word *sisû*, “horse,” are very similar, and they primarily belong to meaningful paradigmatic (other equids and pack animals) and syntagmatic (words related to horses) categories. When analyzing the very frequent verb *qabû*, “to say,” fastText outperforms word2vec. The fastText results again fall into both paradigmatic and syntagmatic categories, but the words are very intelligible in the context of “saying” or “speaking.” Finally, the word2vec and fastText results for the rare verb *danânu*, “to be(come) strong,” are very different from each other and of a lesser quality than the results for *sisû* and *qabû*. The tools discover only a few paradigmatic relationships (word2vec: *gašru*,

“strong,” and *dandannu*, “all-powerful”; fastText: *rabû*, “to be(come) big”), while fastText especially highlights several syntagmatic categories (military, building works, and writing) in which *danānu* is known to occur.⁵⁶

Table 2 seems to indicate that the number of attestations of a word has a direct effect on the quality of the word2vec and fastText results.⁵⁷ Although the most infrequent word *danānu*, “to be(come) strong,” is a verb, there are only three verbs among the ten most similar words according to fastText and no verbs at all in the word2vec results. Moreover, only one of the verbs in the fastText results (*rabû*, “to be[come] big”) has a similar meaning as *danānu*. On the contrary, the results for *sisû* and *qabû* primarily belong to the same part of speech as the target words. From the perspective of semantic similarity, paradigmatic relations are more prominent in the results for *sisû* and *qabû*, suggesting that the numerous attestations of these words have improved the quality of their word vectors.

Although analysis of *sisû*, *qabû*, and *danānu* indicates that the frequency of a word dictates the quality of its word vector, this view changes in light of the fastText results for the divine name Nergal, which is attested only 192 times in another dataset.⁵⁸ Table 3 shows the ten most similar word vectors to Nergal. These ten words are all divine names and many of these deities share similar functions with Nergal, the god of plagues and violent death. In light of the fastText results in tables 2 and 3, the frequency of a word does not affect the quality of our results as much as the distinctiveness of the contexts in which the word appears. In our small datasets, fastText excels in finding paradigmatic relationships for words that are attested in well-defined contexts and whose usage shows little variety. This probably explains why Nergal’s list entirely consists of other deities, while the lists for common nouns and verbs show more variation. The case in point is *danānu*, a verb that appears quite rarely (221 attestations) and is used in a variety of different contexts.

56. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 237–38.

57. See also Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” 251.

58. Jauhiainen and Alstola, dataset used for “Fast(Text) Analysis of Mesopotamian Divine Names,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.4327394. This dataset consists of 5,056 texts from the Neo-Assyrian period, while the dataset used in Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains,” consists of 8,392 texts that are of a more diverse nature. This likely affects our results, but rather than invalidating them, it actually corroborates the conclusion that the homogeneity of contexts improves the fastText results.

Nergal (192 attestations)

Ninurta	warrior god
Bēl	common byname of the god Marduk
Zababa	warrior god
Adad	storm god, also connected to warfare
Papsukkal	attendant of the great gods
Laš	Nergal's wife
Ištar	goddess of love and war
Nusku	Enlil's attendant
Šamaš	god of the sun and justice
Pālil	god related to warfare

Table 3. The ten most similar words to the divine name Nergal according to fastText. First published in Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis.”

The word vectors created with word2vec and fastText have proven to be useful in studying words from an emic perspective. We have observed that some Akkadian words are used in very different contexts and have obviously different meanings even though their English translations suggest close similarity. For example, the word vectors for five Akkadian verbs translated as “to fear, to be afraid of” are not very similar to each other.⁵⁹ This result emphasizes the necessity to study the words and concepts of a language in relation to each other, not in relation to their translations or concepts foreign to that language.

The pitfalls of projecting concepts from one language and culture onto another are also highlighted by the case of comparing the vectors for king and queen. As explained above, a calculation of the English language vectors *king* – *man* + *woman* results in a vector that is very close to the vector for *queen*. However, a similar calculation *šarru* (“king”) – *zikaru* (“male, man”) + *sinništu* (“female, woman”) does resemble other vectors for female persons but not a vector representing *šarratu* or any other Akkadian word for “queen.”⁶⁰ This results from a significant difference between English and Akkadian. The word *šarru* refers to earthly and divine kings, but *šarratu* almost exclusively to goddesses and occasionally to foreign

59. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” esp. 485.

60. Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis,” 154–55.

queens.⁶¹ At the same time, the word used as a title for Assyrian queens (*issi ēkalli* or *sēgallu*) is rarely attested in our textual material. However, a similar query provided excellent results with Akkadian divine names. In hoping to show similarity between the two divine couples Marduk and Zarpanītu and Nabû and Tašmētu, we calculated “Nabû – Marduk + Zarpanītu.” The most similar word vector was that of Tašmētu.⁶²

6.3.4. Linguistic Networks and Research Workflow

The basic output we have produced with PMI, word2vec, and fastText are lists of the best collocates or words that appear in the most similar semantic contexts. Although the lists are clear and precise, comparing several lists to one another is very time-consuming for a researcher. Therefore, we have explored ways to visualize our results as networks in which words are represented by nodes and the semantic relationships between them by edges. For a simple example, see figure 2.

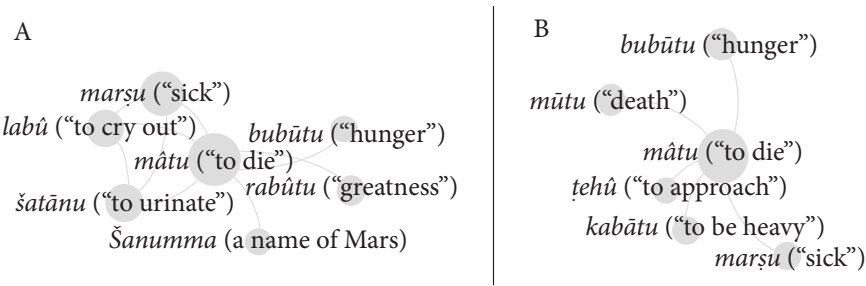


Fig. 2. Linguistic networks of the Akkadian word *mātu*, “to die,” created using (A) PMI scores as edge weights and (B) cosine similarities from fastText as edge weights. The figure was first published in Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches.” The data derive from Heidi Jauhiainen et al., “ANEE Lexical Portal—The Dataset,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.4646661.

In our first experiment with network analysis, we studied the Neo-Assyrian pantheon and the relationships between different deities, as expressed in the textual records.⁶³ In social network analysis (SNA),

61. Svärd, *Women and Power*, 39.
62. Jauhiainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis,” 154–56.
63. Alstola et al., “Aššur and His Friends.”

a widely used method to map the connections between two actors is to trace their participation in the same events.⁶⁴ An ancient document can be analyzed as an event in some cases; thus, a legal transaction would bring together its parties, witnesses, and scribe. Such two-mode affiliation networks consisting of actors and events can be converted into one-mode networks depicting the social ties between the actors who participated in the same events. However, long texts such as epics and royal inscriptions cannot be analyzed as single events, because only those actors attested in the same semantic contexts are likely to share real social ties. When studying Neo-Assyrian divine networks, we discovered that ten-word windows can be successfully used as events that connect deities to each other. As the raw number of cooccurrences gave too much weight to the relationships between frequently attested deities and led to an imbalanced network, we used PPMI² scores as edge weights to create networks that made sense and had explanatory power from an Assyriological perspective.

In our more recent work, we created linguistic networks from the PMI and fastText results, using PMI scores and cosine similarities as edge weights.⁶⁵ We connected words to their best collocates or most similar words, taking the top results from the lists for each word of interest. We produced separate networks for PMI and fastText results using the open-source software Gephi.⁶⁶ We observed that taking the top 50 words from each list makes the networks too detailed and laborious to analyze; more importantly, our methods can detect only a limited number of good collocates or similar words in a small corpus. Accordingly, lists of 10–20 words are more likely to provide meaningful results than lists of 40–50 words.

To organize our network so that the semantically most similar words are close to each other, we visualized the networks using force-directed layout algorithms in Gephi.⁶⁷ Such algorithms make connected nodes attract each other while nonconnected nodes repulse each other. The

64. Mark Newman, *Networks*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 60–62, 115–18.

65. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts”; Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches.”

66. Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, “Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks,” in *Proceedings of the Third International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, ed. Eytan Adar et al. (Menlo Park, CA: AAAI Press, 2009), 361–62.

67. Mathieu Jacomy et al., “ForceAtlas2, a Continuous Graph Layout Algorithm for Handy Network Visualization Designed for the Gephi Software,” *PLoS ONE* 9 (2014): e98679.

larger the edge weight (PMI score or cosine similarity), the stronger the attraction between two connected nodes. The result of such an algorithm is a network in which strongly connected nodes are close to each other, but loosely connected nodes are further away. Groups of nodes that are more closely connected to one other than to the rest of the network form communities, or tight subgroups of nodes. Coloring the communities makes them even more distinguishable in the network. In a network created using PMI or fastText results, these communities represent groups of semantically similar words.

Such graphic networks of lexemes can be described as heterarchical. The term *heterarchy* was originally coined in computer science and has had an impact on the development of artificial intelligence, as the original proposal was that the human brain is not organized hierarchically but heterarchically.⁶⁸ The concept is better known from other fields of study, where the organization of societies and groups of people can be described as heterarchical. In the seminal article by Carole Crumley, she wrote that in a heterarchical organizational structure, “each element possesses the potential of being unranked ... or ranked in a number of different ways.”⁶⁹ In a hierarchical structure, vertical relationships dominate, whereas in a heterarchical structure the connections between elements can be envisioned as lateral. The usefulness of the concept has been suggested for the study of power relationships between individuals in the ancient Near East,⁷⁰ but to our knowledge this concept has not been employed in linguistics. We suggest that it can be a helpful definition when analyzing word networks that are purposefully created as heterarchical networks. Calling the networks heterarchical focuses the attention of the scholar on the nonhierarchical nature of the relationships between words.

One of the outcomes of our project is the ANEE Lexical Networks portal, which allows users to explore Akkadian linguistic networks online

68. Warren McCulloch, “A Heterarchy of Values Determined by the Topology of Neural Nets,” *Bull. Math. Bio.* 7 (1945): 89–93.

69. Carole Crumley, “Three Locational Models: An Epistemological Assessment for Anthropology and Archaeology,” *AAMT* 2 (1979): 144. See also Crumley, “Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies,” *APAAA* 6 (1995): 1–5; Crumley, “Heterarchy,” in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Robert A. Scott and Stephen M. Kosslyn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015).

70. Svärd, *Women and Power*, 147–69.

without having to install Gephi on their computers.⁷¹ The portal contains the networks produced during our project, including the giant network of the approximately 7,000 most frequent Akkadian words in our dataset. We intend to publish the networks created in the future work of the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires on this site as well. We also offer other scholars the possibility to make their networks available on this platform. We hope that the portal will make our results more accessible for the research community and facilitate the digital analysis of ancient languages.

An ancient language cannot be analyzed solely on the basis of PMI and fastText results and their network visualizations, as the texts themselves need to be studied as part of the research process. We have thus developed a hermeneutic feedback loop that unites our computational analysis and philological work. After producing the PMI and fastText results and visualizing them as networks, we use the result lists and networks to identify interesting patterns and words that merit further study. Using the Korp search interface (see §6.2), we study individual or cooccurring words in their context and access the full texts in Oracc. The research process moves back and forth between the lists, networks, Korp results, and full text editions, allowing the researcher to gain insights from both the macro and micro levels. In the case of rare words, it is often more efficient to use the Korp search interface to examine semantic nuances in the primary sources instead of PMI and fastText.

6.4. Conclusions

We see major benefits for research in the approach outlined in this chapter. Our recent article on the term *fear* in Akkadian texts illustrated the relationships between fear words in a way that would be very cumbersome, if not impossible, to trace with the lexical semantic information available in the dictionaries. Furthermore, although dictionaries already document the meaning of a word, with our method one can quantify these meanings and their contexts. For example, some of the verbs expressing fear are clearly used rarely, perhaps only by a small minority of scribes. Our analysis helps make firm conclusions about the actual usage patterns of

71. Aleksa Sahala et al., “ANEE Lexical Networks v.2.0,” <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-2022100301>. For the raw data, see Aleksa Sahala et al., “ANEE Lexical Networks v. 2.0—The Dataset,” Zenodo, doi:10.5281/zenodo.7124351.

words (within the limits of the data) and trace those patterns between text genres and time periods.⁷²

The workflow we have created for studying Akkadian could be applied to other languages with small text corpora. First, we have used Pointwise Mutual Information (PMI) to detect words that typically appear in the same semantic context with our word of interest. This is expected to reveal syntagmatic relationships between words, such as “cooking,” “kitchen,” and “delicious.” Second, we have created word vectors (or embeddings) with word2vec and fastText to find words that do not necessarily appear in the same but in a similar semantic context. The results ought to show paradigmatic relationships, such as “cooking,” “baking,” and “preparing a meal.” Finally, we have visualized our results as word networks and analyzed them in tandem with close reading of the original sources.

A small and repetitive corpus poses challenges for language-technological methods that are primarily applied to larger and more varied corpora. The small size is not a major problem for PMI, but if repetitiveness is not dealt with, the best collocates are often words that appear in formulaic expressions or passages that are repeated several times in genres such as royal inscriptions. As shown by the work of our research group, the quality of the PMI results can be improved by assigning penalties to words attested in repetitive contexts.⁷³ As expected, PMI primarily discovers syntagmatic relationships, but because the Akkadian language regularly uses chains of synonyms for emphasis, some paradigmatic relationships appear in the PMI results as well. A good example of this is found with the words *adirtu*, *gilittu*, and *pirittu*, which all mean “fear” or “terror” and are regularly attested together.⁷⁴

We have noticed that the results of word2vec and fastText vary according to the nature of the words under study. The tools successfully detect paradigmatic relationships between divine names and correctly identify the relationships between the divine spouses Marduk and Zarpanitu and Nabû and Tašmētu.⁷⁵ At the same time, common nouns and verbs that occur in more variable linguistic contexts are more difficult for word2vec and fastText, and the results are often a combination

72. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 494–98.

73. Sahala and Lindén, “Improving Word Association Measures.”

74. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 492–93.

75. Jauhainen and Alstola, “Fast(Text) Analysis,” 154–56.

of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, sometimes very similar to the PMI results.⁷⁶

In our most recent work that focused on the Akkadian lexeme “to love” (*râmu*), we studied the effect of genre on the PMI and fastText results.⁷⁷ It was shown that the usage of the same word can vary greatly between different genres, and the genre division of a dataset helps to produce more precise and nuanced PMI and fastText results. A genre provides a more homogeneous context for a word, and thus it can yield good results even if the amount of data it comprises is significantly smaller than in the full dataset.

How to exactly define genres from an emic perspective is a complicated question, but we have reached some interesting results.⁷⁸ The genres that are generally suggested by Assyriologists as native/emic genres are clustered together in a remarkably clear way in a network of emotion words created using fastText results as edge weights (fig. 3). At least the emotion words we have examined in our dataset have much stronger statistical ties to their genre than to the assumed emotional content. In figure 3, each node represents an Akkadian verb or its derivative related to anger, fear, or love.⁷⁹ Each node is labeled with a number that refers to the genre in which the word is attested. Those numbers that represent words related to love are underlined. For example, “11” represents a word that is related to anger or fear and appears in the genre of royal inscriptions (genre 11), whereas “11” represents a word that is related to love and appears in the genre of royal inscriptions.

The network is visualized using a force-directed layout algorithm that draws strongly connected nodes close to each other. In our case, the strength of a connection corresponds to the similarity of the semantic context in which two words are attested. The figure shows that the emotion words related to love (underlined numbers) do not cluster together

76. Svärd et al., “Semantic Domains”; Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts”; Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches.”

77. Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches.”

78. Alstola et al., “Digital Approaches,” 111–12.

79. The verbs are *adâru* (“to be afraid, fear”), *agâgu* (“to become furious”), *ezêzu* (“to become angry,” “to rage”), *galâtu* (“to tremble,” “to be afraid”), *kamâlu* (“to become angry”), *labâbu* (“to rage”), *palâhu* (“to fear,” “to revere”), *parâdu* (“to be scared,” “to be terrified”), *ra’âbu* (“to shake,” “to tremble”), *râmu* (“to love”), *šabâsu* (“to be angry”), *šahâtu* (“to be afraid,” “to fear,” “to hold in awe”), *šamâru* (“to rage,” “to be furious”), and *zenû* (“to be angry”).

into account) with small and large corpora. At the same time, paradigmatic relations are better studied with fastText. A large corpus makes the fastText results better, but a small corpus of texts can yield clear results if it is homogeneous in nature. Homogeneity can be genre-specific vocabulary or repetitiveness of texts (e.g., royal building inscriptions), but the nature of the word of interest itself seems to be another relevant factor. As demonstrated above, good fastText results can be achieved for Nergal because of this name's strong "identity." In other words, Nergal seems to be playing a similar role in texts on average, from a quantitative perspective. Another good result is presented by "fear" and "terror," as expressed by *gilittu* and *pirittu* in Akkadian: they have a very strong semantic profile, because they are very rarely used outside a certain context. Thus, if the contexts of a word are similar across text genres, the paradigmatic domains are easily detected with fastText without needing to differentiate between the genres. However, if the word of interest is used in a wide variety of different contexts—or in contexts that are mainly in use in a specific text genre—examining the word of interest in a single genre can markedly improve the results.

Contexts that are repeated almost verbatim several times influence fastText results and can lead to word lists where the relationships between words are syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic. At the same time, similar but not verbatim contexts can lead to good paradigmatic fastText results. Accordingly, our current understanding is that focus on genre enables us to find relevant paradigmatic results for most words, because the contexts of words are strongly tied to genre in Akkadian texts. It seems to be a special feature of our text material that fastText mostly benefits from contexts that are similar enough, while not exactly the same.

When using fastText to analyze Akkadian texts, a lot of thought needs to be given to the research question itself. Not all concepts can be studied with fastText, and even for those that can be studied, there are sometimes not enough good-quality data available. For example, the concept of "power," which potentially manifests in dozens of Akkadian words and lacks clear contexts in Akkadian texts, is challenging.⁸⁰ However, the research question "what is love?" can have a meaningful answer based on the paradigmatic analysis of the Akkadian verb *rāmu* with fastText.⁸¹

80. For a preliminary assessment of related vocabulary, see Saana Svård, "Power and Women in the Neo-Assyrian Palaces" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2012), 58–65.

81. Alstola et al., "Digital Approaches."

Based on our work so far, we would recommend the analysis of PMI results as a starting point for quantitative work on lexical semantics, but there are also clear benefits for comparing fastText and PMI results and reflecting on syntagmatic and paradigmatic perspectives.⁸² As suggested by Aleksa Sahala, the best method to study paradigmatic relationships in our Akkadian datasets might be the production of word vectors from PMI scores using matrix factorization. This has been shown to outperform tools like word2vec in small datasets.⁸³ PMI-based word vectors should reflect paradigmatic relationships between words fairly well.⁸⁴ For biblical studies in particular, the approach outlined by Sahala might be useful because of the relatively small size of the corpus.

Our research group has made a number of methodological improvements in the methods that we use, while also refining Akkadian linguistic datasets. This methodological leap has been possible by combining elements from the study of cultures (emic-etic), linguistics (paradigmatic and syntagmatic categories), language technology (e.g., PMI and fastText), and network theory (visualizations). This combination of approaches could yield good results for other ancient languages as well. Furthermore, such endeavors might also offer valuable information for comparing languages. Based on these approaches, one could carry out comparative studies between, for example, Akkadian and biblical Hebrew.⁸⁵ Comparisons could be particularly fruitful between these two languages, as connections between ancient Near Eastern literature and the Hebrew Bible are well documented. A comparative approach is further supported by recent cross-linguistic research that has shown that lexical semantics of emo-

82. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 495–96.

83. Jakob Jungmaier, Nora Kassner, and Benjamin Roth, “Dirichlet-Smoothed Word Embeddings for Low-Resource Settings,” in *Proceedings of the 12th Language Resources and Evaluation Conference*, ed. Nicoletta Calzolari et al. (Paris: European Language Resources Association, 2020), 3560–65. For a toolkit for building PMI-based word embeddings especially for cuneiform languages, see Aleksa Sahala, “Pmi-embeddings,” GitHub, <https://github.com/asahala/pmi-embeddings/>.

84. PMI-based word vectors might be able to combine the best of both worlds: the PPMI² measure with context similarity weighting helps downscale the impact of duplicate text passages while retaining the similar contexts.

85. This has already been carried out with traditional methods, for example, by Andrew Riley, *Divine and Human Hate in the Ancient Near East: A Lexical and Contextual Analysis*, PHSC 25 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2017).

tions within the same language family have clear similarities.⁸⁶ A concrete example of this is offered in our recent article on “fear.” In biblical Hebrew, the most common verb expressing fear (*yr*³) refers both to feelings of terror and to a positive reverential attitude or action,⁸⁷ which matches our findings for the Akkadian verb *palāhu*, “to fear.”⁸⁸

We clearly see the potential of these methods for Akkadian and biblical corpora. Although biblical texts are well studied, our methods enable a new kind of quantitative analysis, giving scholars new tools to explore lexicographical questions and relationships between words.

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86. Joshua C. Jackson et al., “Emotion Semantics Show Both Cultural Variation and Universal Structure,” *Science* 366 (2019): 1517–22.

87. Françoise Mirguet, “What Is an ‘Emotion’ in the Hebrew Bible? An Experience That Exceeds Most Contemporary Concepts,” *BiblInt* 24 (2016): 450–51. For example, Prov 9:10 states that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (NRSV).

88. Svärd et al., “Fear in Akkadian Texts,” 486–89. See also Martti Nissinen, “Fear Not: A Study on an Ancient Near Eastern Phrase,” in *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, BZAW 494 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 195–232.

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7

Assyriology Meets Biblical Studies

Sebastian Fink and Gina Konstantopoulos

7.1. Introduction

The roots of Assyriology are closely entwined with the field of biblical studies and with a scholarly and public interest in the Bible and its related contexts. Many of the earliest Assyriologists were theologians by training and studied Mesopotamian texts in the context of that experience and scholarly background and with the aim of improving their understanding of the Hebrew Bible. In these early days of Assyriology, spectacular archaeological discoveries in Iraq yielded fantastic artistic evidence and a wealth of cuneiform tablets that would provide the first glances at a literary tradition that preceded that of biblical texts. In the earliest periods of its development as a field, Assyriology was often seen as a tool to understand the cultural background of the Hebrew Bible by both theologians and Assyriologists themselves. This Mesopotamian material was first thought to connect directly to the Bible by providing context and was initially situated as its pagan background.

The study of Mesopotamia gained true prominence following the great excavations and discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century. Early explorers like Claudius James Rich, Paul-Émile Botta, and Austen Henry Layard filled European collections with pieces from Babylon, Nineveh, and Persepolis, and their books and exhibitions in major European museums made ancient Mesopotamia a highly popular topic. This fame arose from multiple sources: to be sure, the fantastic monuments and the majestic, excavated palaces and temples, especially those of Nineveh with their impressive reliefs, garnered great popular attention and were exhibited all over Europe, but added to this was the interest in and expectation of

additional evidence for the historicity of the Bible. After the firm establishment of Assyriology as an academic discipline, however, a new generation of Assyriologists emerged. These new Assyriologists were no longer converted students of theology; instead, Assyriology was their main subject of scholarly interest. Their aim was no longer to study the Bible but to study Mesopotamia itself. Benno Landsberger, who worked at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago from the late 1940s onwards, was one of the proponents of this new generation. The esteemed Assyriologist famously advised others in the field to study the conceptual autonomy of Mesopotamia in and of itself and on its own merits and to thus move away from the study of it solely as a predecessor of later cultures.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the early excavations of Mesopotamian sites, moving to the subsequent reactions to the discovery of close parallels between cuneiform texts and the Hebrew Bible. Following this, the focus will shift to a discussion of the Babel-Bible controversy and the idea of the plagiarized Bible in the first decades of the twentieth century. While these early periods were characterized by intense popular appeal and public interest, the later developments in Assyriology were more scholarly sound and academically engaging but less outwardly and immediately sensational; thus, they attracted less interest from the general public. On the scholarly front, however, this interest remained, and we see the era of comparative studies, characterized by massive efforts to provide biblical scholars with reliable editions and translations of ancient Near Eastern texts. While Assyriological material was, and is, ever-increasingly studied on its own merits and within its own context, the appeal of a connection to biblical material—whether perceived or actual—remains potent. This chapter will thus close with a brief discussion of how this relationship has changed over time and how biblical studies, as well as related fields and interpretations of biblical material, have continued to use Mesopotamian material.

7.2. Biblical Roots and Early Excavations: A Deluge of Early Interests

Two objects take central billing in the early history and development of the field of Assyriology: the Behistun Inscription and the Flood Tablet. These two are in many respects quite distinct. The former is a trilingual inscription found in the Kermanshah Province in modern-day Iran, carved into the cliff face high up; the latter, currently in the collections of the British Museum, is a tablet from the library of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurba-

nipal at the site of Nineveh. And yet, both had key roles to play in the development of Assyriology as a discipline and a field.

For the Behistun Inscription, these connections are more academic—literally. The carved cliff face shows a relief depiction of the Achaemenid ruler Darius I (549–486 BCE) receiving homage from a procession of defeated and subservient rulers, with the winged solar disc floating above the entire procession. A trilingual inscription—written in Elamite, Old Persian, and Babylonian, the southern dialect of Akkadian—was key. The inscription was first documented and published, in copy, by Carsten Niebuhr in the late eighteenth century; however, dedicated work on the text began only a half-century later: Henry Rawlinson focused on the Old Persian text, which, thanks to its cuneiform semialphabetic script, was much easier to decipher.¹ Once the Old Persian text was translated, it served as a key to tackling the corresponding Babylonian text. Thankfully, Akkadian is a Semitic language and was thus related to other, well-known and understood languages, including biblical Hebrew and Arabic.² These linguistic relationships proved an essential aid to understanding Akkadian.

7.3. George Smith and Cuneiform's Popular Appeal

As opposed to the visually striking and imposing Behistun Inscription, carved into the mountain face and accompanied by a monumental depiction of the ruler Darius I and the submissive line of his newly defeated foes, the Flood Tablet is a far less imposing 15 × 13 centimeters in size. The tablet (K.3375) was part of the Library of Assurbanipal, a Neo-Assyrian king from the seventh century BCE who compiled a massive library of tablets at the Assyrian city of Nineveh. The text, written in a precise scribal hand common to the library, recounts the story of the flood from Tablet

1. Niebuhr's copy and transcription were published in two volumes in 1774 and 1778.

2. The early days of decipherment were the work of several people, including Edward Hincks who provided critical contributions to the early study of Akkadian and thereafter Sumerian; see Kevin J. Cathcart, "The Earliest Contributions to the Decipherment of Sumerian and Akkadian," *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* (2011): art. 1, pp. 1–12. For a detailed discussion of the decipherment of cuneiform, also taking into account the work of Georg Friedrich Grotefend, see Nele Diekmann, *Talbot's Tool: Notizbücher als Denklabor eines viktorianischen Keilschriftforschers*, *Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient* 25 (Gladbeck: PeWe Verlag, 2017), 70–130.

XI of the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh. Having ventured to the ends of the earth in search of immortality, Gilgamesh finds Utnapishtim, who tells him the story of a massive flood meant to destroy humanity, one he alone survived. This first-millennium tale is part of a longer history: the excerpt in Gilgamesh borrows from the earlier tale of Atrahasis, and a Sumerian version of the flood story is known as well.³

The story portrayed on K.3375 was immediately recognizable: a massive flood sent down by the gods, with one man instructed to build an ark and so endure the calamity. The parallels to the biblical account were present in details as well, with Utnapishtim (who unsurprisingly is referenced, even in modern-day scholarship, with the unfortunate epithet of “the Mesopotamian Noah”) sending out birds to find evidence that the flood had finally receded and that land could be found. To the late nineteenth-century public, this appeared to be historical confirmation of the events of the Bible; scripture provided with clear and evidentiary proof. When George Smith, working in the British Museum, first deciphered the tablet in 1872, he was overtaken with excitement, and the public shared his enthusiasm. Smith certainly further contributed to this popular interest with his own 1876 publication of a collection of Mesopotamian myths and legends, entitled *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, drawing directly upon one of the biblical synonyms for the term *Babylonian*. He further highlighted similarities with biblical material when introducing his translation of Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation myth, with the statement that “the story, so far as I can judge from the fragment, agrees generally with the account of Creation in the Book of Genesis, but shows traces of having originally included very much more matter.”⁴

Mesopotamia and the Bible were entwined before this event, to be sure: outside of the classical Greek sources such as Herodotus’s *Histories* and the fragmentary *History of Mesopotamia* by Berossus, a Babylonian priest from the Hellenistic period, the major sources of information for Mesopotamia were biblical. They were also known to a wider section of

3. For an overview of the Library of Assurbanipal, see Irving Finkel, “Assurbanipal’s Library: An Overview,” in *Libraries before Alexandria: Ancient Near Eastern Traditions*, ed. Kim Ryholt and Gojko Barjamovic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 367–89. On the flood story and its decipherment, see Finkel, *The Ark before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014).

4. George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (London: Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1876), 62.

the general public, unlike the classical texts that were more limited in their appeal.⁵ In addition to references to the Assyrian conquest of Israel and siege of Jerusalem found in Isaiah, 2 Kings, and Chronicles, biblical depictions of Mesopotamia concentrated on portrayals of Babylon itself, a fact tied to Nebuchadnezzar II's mass deportation of a portion of the population of Jerusalem.

7.4. Popular Culture and the Victorians

Excavations had already begun to uncover the great palaces and temples of Assyria by the mid-nineteenth century, and the rich detail of their finds was immediately striking. Newspapers such as *The Illustrated London News* ran headlines about the “Nimroud Sculptures Just Received at the British Museum,” with drawings of the recent finds and sketches of well-dressed members of the public gazing in awe at a *lamassu*, a winged human-head bull colossus that guarded the entranceways to Assyrian palace and temple buildings.⁶ When the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard published a book in 1849 detailing his excavations of the city of Nineveh, it was a bestseller.⁷ Similarly, the Nineveh Court at the Sydenham Crystal Palace brought these finds to realized—if dramatic and somewhat imagined—life for the public, who could visit a full-color recreation of their glory, with Layard offering critical and substantial input to the design.⁸

These dramatic finds, alongside a desire to unearth further proof for biblical events, led to an increased interest in the material that was

5. On the depiction of the ancient Near East and Egypt in classical sources, see Kevin M. McGeough, *Collecting, Constructing, and Curating*, vol. 2 of *The Ancient Near East in the Nineteenth Century: Appreciations and Appropriations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 58–80.

6. “Nimroud Sculptures Lately Received at the British Museum,” *The Illustrated London News* 13.348, December 16, 1848, pp. 373–74; “Nimroud Sculptures Just Received at the British Museum,” *The Illustrated London News* 17.452, October 26, 1850, pp. 331–32.

7. Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil Worshipers; And an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians* (London: John Murray, 1849).

8. See McGeough, *Collecting, Constructing, and Curating*, 299–336; and Michael Seymour, “The Babylon of D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance*,” in *Imagining Ancient Cities in Film: From Babylon to Cinecittà*, ed. Marta García Morcillo, Pauline Hanesworth, and Óscar Marchena (New York: Routledge, 2015), 21.

coupled with funding for further excavations: the tablet collection in the British Museum currently identified by the siglum “DT” is listed as such because the Daily Telegraph provided funding for the 1872 excavation that unearthed them. The material in the British Museum and elsewhere added new depth to the experience and relationship that visitors and the public already had with biblical material, providing an extra layer of authenticity and thus helping to manufacture a “hyper-real” experience.⁹ This interest carried the initial stages of excavations and reception, in Britain and France in particular. As more textual material was translated, however, a scholarly discussion of Assyriological texts on their own merits began to grow.

7.5. German Assyriology and the Idea of the Plagiarized Bible

Friedrich Delitzsch (1850–1922) is famous as the initiator of the so-called Babel-Bible Controversy, and he most prominently interpreted the Old Testament as a late offspring of ancient Near Eastern literature. Mesopotamia had a well-established negative image in the books of the Bible and also classical literature mostly draws a rather negative image of the powerful, but decadent and superstitious East. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Semiramis¹⁰ and Sardanapalus¹¹ are the two most prominent Mesopotamian figures in classical sources. A lot of effort was invested in establishing the historical reality behind Semiramis and Sardanapalus, and indeed Semiramis can be connected with the Assyrian royal wife and royal mother Sammu-ramât,¹² while Sardanapalus was often identified with the above-mentioned Assurbanipal. However, various motifs and different historical events seem to have been combined in those two figures, so that we are hardly able to grasp any historical reality in their depiction in

9. As described in Kevin M. McGeough, “Negotiating the Real and the Hyperreal: Nineteenth-Century Experiences of the Bible in the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Discoveries,” *Biblical Reception* 1 (2012): 397–422.

10. Kerstin Droß-Krüpe, *Semiramis, de qua innumerabilia narrantur: Rezeption und Verargumentierung der Königin von Babylon von der Antike bis in die opera seria des Barock*, *Classica et Orientalia* 25 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020).

11. Sebastian Fink, “Sardanapal—Ein Hedonist aus Mesopotamien?,” in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond; Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday on June 23, 2014*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa et al., AOAT 412 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 239–50.

12. Robert Rollinger, “Semiramis,” *RIA* 12 (2009–2012): 383–86.

classical sources.¹³ With the fully justified aim to correct the biased view of the classical and biblical sources and to highlight the importance of Mesopotamia for our understanding of the history of religion, Delitzsch prominently presented his ideas in a series of lectures, which were published as “Babel und Bibel.” However, he sometimes drew conclusions too quickly and overinterpreted Mesopotamian evidence with the conviction that the Bible offers a key to their interpretation. So Mesopotamia became the place of origin, not only for different motifs of biblical stories but also of monotheism. The reconstructed Mesopotamian astral religion and the Epic of Gilgamesh were seen as the main documents of Mesopotamian religion and as the ultimate source of the theology of the Old Testament.

The lectures and the publication created an immense public interest and Delitzsch’s ideas quickly became prominent in Germany.¹⁴ However, as this obviously was not only an academic discussion but at this time a provocation for all those who believed in the Old Testament as divine revelation, Delitzsch’s lecture provoked a heated public discussion. Jewish and Christian theologians attacked the ideas of Delitzsch, he countered their attacks, and the public showed a deep interest in the discussion for a while.¹⁵

In order to highlight the public influence of Delitzsch’s work, one should mention Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), one of the foremost and extremely popular proponents of Darwinist theory in Germany. He drew on the genealogical argument—the Bible is not revealed, as we can trace Mesopotamian predecessors of several biblical stories—in order to convince his readers that Christianity is as unscientific and full of superstition as Mesopotamian religion. In his widely read book *Die Welträtsel*, which was first published in 1899 and reprinted in several editions,¹⁶ he stated

13. See Wolfgang Röllig, “Sardanapa(l)os,” *RIA* 12 (2009–2012): 36–37.

14. These lectures were published and reprinted many times. Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel: Erster Vortrag* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905) is already the fifth reprint of his first lecture.

15. For a detailed discussion of these events, see Reinhard G. Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit*, OBO 133 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). A convenient summary is given in Reinhard G. Lehmann, “Der Babel-Bibel-Streit: Ein kulturpolitisches Wetterleuchten,” in *Babylon: Focus mesopotamischer Geschichte, Wiege früher Gelehrsamkeit, Mythos in der Moderne*, ed. Johannes Renger (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druck und Verlag, 1999), 505–21.

16. In 1921 the pocket edition alone, which was first published in 1909, achieved a circulation of 380,000 copies. See title page of Ernst Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel* (repr., Stuttgart: Kröner, 1921).

that the Trinity, like most other Christian teachings, is not an innovation but taken over from older religions. In the case of the Trinity, he argues that the concept is based on the Chaldean trinity of gods.¹⁷ With Haeckel we can clearly see that Delitzsch's ideas had become popular and that a huge public in Germany was at least partly informed about Mesopotamian religion or, to be more correct, about Mesopotamian religion as it was reconstructed by Delitzsch.

However, Delitzsch was not the only Assyriologist of this time who took interest in biblical matters. The rather moderate and systematic works of Alfred Jeremias, pastor and professor of comparative religion by profession, provide us with a nice overview of the discussion in the early 1900s. One of the notable achievements of Jeremias is his German translation of Gilgamesh from 1891, but later the hard-working pastor devoted his time to highlighting the importance of the Mesopotamian evidence for biblical studies, and his work on the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern sources was printed in several editions.¹⁸ While most Assyriologists focused on the Old Testament, some also engaged with the New Testament, among them Jeremias.¹⁹

The early Assyriologists were explorers. They had to deal with many gaps in the evidence, and sometimes their painstaking work in deciphering cuneiform texts without all the tools that are available to their modern heirs resulted in great discoveries that largely changed our ideas about antiquity. Sometimes, however, they read their texts with the expectation of finding connections, and they drew far-reaching conclusion too easily. Heinrich Zimmern (1862–1931) was professor of Assyriology at Leipzig University, and German Assyriology greatly profited from his abilities as a teacher and researcher. Assyriology as a subject taught at universities was only about to be established when he was a student, so he studied theology and Semitic languages and therefore had a firm background and a deep interest in biblical studies. In many of his contributions, he aimed at demonstrating the relevance of ancient Near Eastern material by establishing its place in religious history in general and its parallels with the Bible in particular. While most of his contributions deal with parallels to the Old

17. Ernst Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel* (Leipzig: Kröner, 1909), 170.

18. Alfred Jeremias, *Izdubar-Nimrod: Eine altbabylonische Heldensage* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891); Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904).

19. Alfred Jeremias, *Babylonisches im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905).

Testament, he also engaged in the debate of Mesopotamian predecessors of the “myth of Christ.”²⁰

As Zimmern explains in the introduction, his book *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe”* was a reaction to several works of his time, which argued against the historicity of Jesus or tried to explain Christian religion as an offspring of older Mesopotamian religions.²¹ Zimmern himself took a rather moderate position and saw his aim mainly in providing the historian of religion with parallels. However, he did not stop with collecting parallels; he also tried to explain them and gave three reasons for their existence: the first is a true genealogical relationship (the Mesopotamian source somehow influenced the biblical text); the second is the common worldview, the context of Jewish and Christian religion in a part of the world deeply influenced by Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions; and the third reason for parallels is the psychological condition of humans.²²

While Haeckel was a sworn enemy of Christianity, this was surely not the case with Zimmern. Zimmern tried to avoid conflicts with believers and stated that, despite the fact that some things might have been taken over from Mesopotamia, they were transformed to a religion of a higher order in the Old and New Testament.²³ In this context we should mention Zimmern’s discussion of the so-called Marduk Ordeal some years later, which he interpreted as evidence for the death and resurrection of Marduk. His reading of the fragmentary text led him to the conclusion that this text shows many parallels with the death and resurrection of Jesus as described in the New Testament. While some scholars accepted or rejected Zimmern’s ideas without a firm discussion of the cuneiform text itself, it was not until 1955 that a serious new edition of this text was undertaken by Wolfram von Soden, who offered a new interpretation of the text and identified it as a piece of anti-Babylonian propaganda. The many parallels that were observed by Zimmern faded away with von Soden’s new edition of the text.²⁴ The excitement of discovery sometimes leads to wrong interpretations of texts, especially if they are perceived along well-known

20. Heinrich Zimmern, *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe”: Das babylonische Material in seinen Hauptpunkten dargestellt* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1910).

21. Zimmern, *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe,”* 3–12.

22. Zimmern, *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe,”* 12–13.

23. Zimmern, *Zum Streit um die “Christusmythe,”* 13.

24. Wolfram von Soden, “Gibt es ein Zeugnis dafür, daß die Babylonier an die Wiederauferstehung Marduks geglaubt haben?,” *ZA* 51 (1955): 130–60.

biblical lines. The construal of the Marduk Ordeal as a story similar to that of the death and resurrection of Jesus could only have happened in a society where the latter was a well-established and important story. Otherwise, no one would have entertained the idea of reading the pattern into the fragmentary text as presented by Zimmern in his 1918 edition.²⁵

7.6. The Conceptual Autonomy of Mesopotamia

In the wild years of comparative studies, far-reaching conclusions were drawn too easily, and great insights were presented along with unreasonable claims, which led to an impression of Assyriology as a highly speculative field. This might have discouraged many Assyriologists to take part in such enterprises, but a new generation of Assyriologists evolved that had actually studied Assyriology at the university level and had not been educated as theologians. One of the students of Zimmern, Benno Landsberger, who became one of the leading Assyriologists of the twentieth century, was a member of this new generation, and in his famous inaugural lecture on the “Conceptual Autonomy of the Babylonian World,” he pointed out that the Mesopotamian cultures deserve to be studied in their own right.²⁶ Obviously, this was a statement directed against the many approaches of the older generation of scholars, who had tried to integrate the Mesopotamian evidence into an evolutionary conception of history, awarding it a firm place in the development of their own culture.²⁷

Landsberger was surely right to highlight the necessity of understanding Mesopotamian cultures on their own terms and not only as predecessors of modern Western culture, and his lecture might be seen as a turning point. While members of the old generation like Jeremias

25. Heinrich Zimmern, *Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest: Zweiter Beitrag*, Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse 70.5 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1918).

26. On the intellectual context of Landsberger’s lecture and the use von Soden made of it, see Sebastian Fink, “Language and Race in Assyriology: From Benno Landsberger to Wolfram von Soden,” in *Perspectives on the History of Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, ed. Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Lorenzo Verderame (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 25–43.

27. Benno Landsberger, “Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt,” *Isis* 2 (1926): 355–72. Landsberger, *The Conceptual Autonomy of the Babylonian World*, trans. Thorkild Jacobsen, Benjamin R. Foster, and Heinrich von Siebenthal, Sources and Monographs on the Ancient Near East 1.4 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1976).

still followed their established paths of interpretation, Landsberger and his students with their strong philological focus changed the direction of Assyriological studies significantly. They, especially von Soden, provided Assyriology with countless new editions of texts and also with dictionaries and grammars, which are standard tools until today. As von Soden's work demonstrates, Assyriology had become a subject with a strong focus on philology. Comparative studies, especially in connection with the Bible, was something that Assyriologists primarily pursued in their own time or after retirement.

7.7. The Era of Comparative Studies

While Assyriology no longer made newspaper headlines with its insights and instead developed into a rather esoteric field with difficult to understand publications full of enigmatic abbreviations that only initiated scholars were able to decipher, some Assyriologists and biblical scholars started to provide research with easily accessible translations of important Mesopotamian texts. Titles like "Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament," the "The Context of Scripture," or "Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments" clearly demonstrate their intention. They wanted to provide the biblical scholar with ancient Near Eastern context for the books of the Bible; additionally, they provided the student of Assyriology with easily accessible translations of important texts. Contextualization is one of our most important methods if we want to understand texts, artifacts, or social and cultural phenomena. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of the cultural background in which the books of the Bible emerged, and the context for many books of the Hebrew Bible is provided by cuneiform sources, or, to quote James Pritchard:

The purpose of this work is to make available to students of the ancient Near East—serious students of the Old Testament, we believe, are necessarily such—the most important extrabiblical texts in translations.²⁸

As Assyriologists, we have the impression that biblical scholars are well aware of the importance of the ancient Near Eastern context for their studies and that major research projects in which many researchers from

28. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), xix.

different fields participate have succeeded in widening the horizon of biblical scholars, which is evidenced by the tremendous amount of publications dealing with problems or topics that originate in Old Testament studies and take into account the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Levantine evidence.

While in Old Testament studies the awareness of the relevance of the Mesopotamian material was quite high, classicists long tended to ignore or at least underestimate its relevance. In order to bridge the gaps between the different disciplines studying the ancient world, Simo Parpola initiated an organization that eventually became known as the Melammu Project in 1999.²⁹ The main aim of this project was to overcome the paradigm of a European (Greco-Roman) history that could be clearly separated from and shared no common traits with the ancient Near East. However, not only classicists and Assyriologists took part in Melammu meetings, but also biblical scholars, Iranists, and archaeologists soon joined this endeavor. Until the end of the year 2020, the Melammu Project organized more than twenty-five symposia and workshops on three continents, inviting scholars from different disciplines who together tried to achieve a deeper understanding of the ancient world, its religion, its literature, its history, and its ideology. In a provocative article entitled “Back to Delitzsch and Jeremias,”³⁰ Parpola encouraged Assyriologists and biblical scholars alike to reread the work of Delitzsch and Jeremias and reevaluate them in the light of new discoveries and methodological refinements. The works of our forebears should not only be of historical interest, but sometimes these works can provide us with great insights and bring up interesting questions.

While biblical studies relatively soon integrated the ancient Near Eastern evidence, new dates for many books of the Old Testament place them firmly in the Persian era or even in a Hellenized world, which means that the context of Scripture now also includes the works of Greek poets and

29. *Melammu* designates the fearsome radiance that is emitted by Mesopotamian kings, see Robert M. Whiting, “Introduction,” in *The Heirs of Assyria*, ed. Sanna Aro and Robert M. Whiting, Melammu Symposia 1 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000), xiii–xv.

30. Simo Parpola, “Back to Delitzsch and Jeremias: The Relevance of the Pan-Babylonian School to the Melammu-Project,” in *Schools of Oriental Studies and the Development of Modern Historiography*, ed. Antonio Panaino and Andrea Piras, Melammu Symposia 4 (Milan: Ed. Mimesis, 2004), 237–47.

philosophers. As an exemplary study we might mention Martti Nissinen's volume *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives*.³¹

7.8. Popular Culture and Presenting Heritage in the 1900s and 2000s

Over time, the interactions between Assyriology and the Bible studies changed and evolved, particularly in recent times. Here, we discuss two major avenues for such change: first, the ways in which Assyriological figures and concepts are reinterpreted in a modern biblical (that is to say, monotheistic) framework; and second, the way Assyriological material is being used to serve a biblical, particularly evangelical Christian, narrative.

The first of these avenues has its roots in early cinema. D. W. Griffith's 1916 silent film *Intolerance* covered four parallel storylines over its nearly four hours of runtime, including among them depictions of the crucifixion and of the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE. The film was epic in every sense of the word, and its budget was massive by the silent film standards of the day; much of that budget was dedicated to reproducing the lavish feast and set pieces that created Babylon, with some 16,000 extras included in some shots.³² These depictions of the ancient Near East were rooted in biblical imaginings and driven by an interest in the Mesopotamian events that were specifically referenced in biblical contexts. They are also one further link in a longer chain of such adaptations, one which includes plays, such as Byron's 1821 *Sardanapalus*, and Verdi's opera *Nabucco*, the latter of which drew from biblical depictions of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II.³³ In more modern popular culture, depictions of Mesopotamia have changed as it is contrasted with

31. Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

32. On *Intolerance* and its depictions of Babylon, see Kevin M. McGeough, "Babylon's Last Bacchanal: Mesopotamia and the Near East in Epic Biblical Cinema," in *Receptions of the Ancient Near East in Popular Culture and Beyond*, ed. Lorenzo Verderame and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2020), 117–40; and Michael Seymour, "Babylon," in *Cities of God: The Bible and Archaeology in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. David Gange and Michael Ledger-Lomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 164–96.

33. On *Nabucco*, see Michael Seymour, "Power and Seduction in Babylon: Verdi's *Nabucco*," in *Seduction and Power: Antiquity in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed. Silke Knippschild and Marta García Morcillo (London: Routledge, 2013), 9–20; Charles Kean's 1853 staging of *Sardanapalus* showcased sets that drew strongly upon

biblical monotheism. In one of the most common manifestations of this, ancient Near Eastern deities are often repackaged as demons, as is the case of the netherworld and plague deity Nergal, who is repurposed to act as a demonic antagonist when appearing in the DC Comics title *Hellblazer*, for example. The most famous example of this brand of modern repackaging is undoubtedly that of Pazuzu, who served as the demonic antagonist in the 1973 film *The Exorcist*.³⁴ Although Pazuzu was certainly a demon when appearing in his native first-millennium BCE Mesopotamian context, he worked to guard and protect against the far more dangerous Lamashtu and was thus employed to apotropaic ends. In *The Exorcist* film and later television series (Fox 2016–2017), Pazuzu is entirely antagonistic, possessing a young girl, even though his proper *modus operandi* is quite the opposite. He has been reimagined to fit within a biblical framework, repurposed as a demonic denizen of a more Christian hell.

The interaction between ancient Near Eastern material and evangelical contexts is not necessarily any more subtle than the demonic Pazuzu of *The Exorcist*, but it is more complicated in its interconnections and use. We will provide two examples of this complex topic: the Creation Museum and the Museum of the Bible (MOTB). The Creation Museum, which opened in 2007 in Kentucky, is the work of the group Answers in Genesis (AiG), a Christian creation apologetics group. AiG wishes to advance a narrative of the literal interpretation of biblical events, including, most notably, young Earth Creationism, and the Creation Museum presents evidence to this end, examples of which include ancient Near Eastern material.³⁵ In advancing Young Earth creationism, however, the Creation Museum identifies itself, regardless of its own intent, more closely with the fundamentalist side of the evangelical spectrum.

The Museum of the Bible (MOTB), on the other hand, positions itself as an academically rigorous institution that presents the history of the

the Assyrian material exhibited in the British Museum and Layard's descriptions of the excavations of the sites.

34. See Lorenzo Verderame, "Evil from an Ancient Past and the Archaeology of the Beyond: An Analysis of the Movies *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Evil Dead* (1981)," in Verderame and Garcia-Ventura, *Receptions of the Ancient Near East*, 159–80.

35. On the Creation Museum, see Jill Stevenson, *Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 128–61; Dustin Nash, "Fossilized Jews and Witnessing Dinosaurs at the Creation Museum: Public Remembering and Forgetting at a Young Earth Creationist 'Memory Place,'" *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 14 (2019): 1–25.

Bible, with a permanent exhibition on precisely that topic.³⁶ The Museum, which opened in 2017 near the National Mall in Washington, DC, was funded in large part by the Green family, owners and founders of Hobby Lobby and among the most prominent donors to evangelical organizations and causes in America. Here, too, ancient Near Eastern material is coopted to serve particular narrative ends. The MOTB includes an exhibition entitled “The People of the Land: History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel,” made up of objects on long-term loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority. Perhaps the most significant asset to the MOTB, however, is the Green Collection. Begun in 2009, the Green Collection was one of the largest private collections of biblical texts, artifacts, and related material, and it included thousands of cuneiform tablets.³⁷ Objects among the collection were looted from Iraq, leading to the seizure of some in 2011 and a civil forfeiture case in 2017, the result of which required Hobby Lobby to return 3,800 looted artifacts to Iraq and pay a fine of three million dollars.³⁸ The cuneiform material intended for the MOTB was designed to serve a specific purpose—and that purpose, it seemed, could be served regardless of the material’s original proper context. As the field of Assyriology moves forward, such interactions with intent will undoubtedly continue and should be recognized for both their interest and engagement and the inherent perspectives they bring to bear on the ancient Near Eastern material with which they engage.

7.9. Conclusion

The relationship between Assyriology and biblical studies has evolved over its long history, sometimes troubled by ideological fights. In the early days, some of this tension arose from Assyriologists who, searching the biblical *Uroffenbarung* in Mesopotamian texts, subsequently declared the Bible to

36. On the Museum of the Bible, see overview and discussion in Kelly Gannon and Kimberly Wagner, “Museum of the Bible, Washington, D.C.,” *Journal of American History* 105 (2017): 618–25.

37. On the Green Collection (and the Green family’s collecting), see Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); see also the contribution of Rick Bonnie to this volume.

38. The 2017 civil forfeiture case was entitled “United States of America vs. Approximately Four Hundred Fifty (450) Ancient Cuneiform Tablets; and Approximately Three Thousand (3,000) Ancient Clay Bullae.”

be a late offspring of the Mesopotamian tradition. Such a declaration had the dual effect of frustrating Assyriologists, who saw their incipient field reduced to providing context for the Bible, and biblical scholars, who saw the Bible's originality supplanted in favor of this older Mesopotamian context. These conflicts, thankfully, are primarily a thing of the past, and we have learned to acknowledge that every text has a history, that every piece of art has its predecessors, and that the originality and value of any one work is not diminished by our ability, new-found or well-established, to trace the origins of some of its elements.

Today, the study of the Hebrew Bible and the study of Assyriology are two neighboring academic disciplines that can profit from each other, both benefiting from an active and engaged exchange of scholarship and ideas. We can see the development and establishment of this dialogue not only in published academic works but also in the programs of major conferences, such as a Society of Biblical Literature, which has a number of sessions that cross over between the two, including a group dedicated to "Assyriology and the Bible." In addition, the benefit from this collaboration across fields is clearly seen in research centers—including the project Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions, which, though focused on material more closely related to biblical studies, included several Assyriologists, a cooperation that yielded fruitful results.

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8

Source Criticism Meets Archaeology: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Abel (and Dan?) in 2 Samuel 20:18–19

Izaak J. de Hulster and Tuukka Kauhanen

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we present a text-critical problem in 2 Sam 20:18–19: Does the wise woman speak of “Abel” or “Abel and Dan”? We present the textual witnesses and consider how the preserved readings should be evaluated. That examination involves textual criticism of both the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint and questions about how the Septuagint functions as a translation. For want of an established term encompassing everything that is related to the textual sources and their use, we propose calling the textual side of the coin *source criticism*. After a source-critical examination, we consider the plausibility of the historical setting of the story: How did the author imagine the scenario on the walls of Abel-beth-maacah? What is the material and social reality that the story implies? Those considerations call for archaeology and iconography.

We proceed by asking questions about the narrative, the source texts, the witnesses attesting differing readings, and the different ways of interpreting those readings. Those questions are related to broader questions about how texts were copied and changed in antiquity. Our inquiry leads to further questions on what we know about the implied historical setting and what the author and later revisers could have known about Abel-beth-maacah and Dan in different periods of history. At many points, we pause the series of questions to examine the facts. Because of the complexities of the text-critical problem—“Abel” or “Abel and Dan”—and the material evidence, those facts are many and, occasionally, quite technical in nature.

As we have published the facts elsewhere,¹ we try to keep the technicalities to the minimum—but not at the cost of over-simplifying the matters. We hope that the reader finds all the necessary facts to check and, when necessary, oppose our train of thought.

Doing research, a scholar can only proceed step by step. Especially in a publication, the things to consider can only be presented in a linear train of thought. One way of defining *method* is to regard it as the process that leads from the start to the end of the study—at least, the idealized process without the inevitable detours. The considerations we present here do not, however, form a logical deduction with its fixed premises and one solid conclusion. Rather, we are dealing with a web of interrelated ideas. After we have asked the necessary questions and found out the facts, we proceed to mapping the interrelations of the considerations. The proper aim of this chapter is, thus, *not* to present a solution to the text-critical problem or to examine the material evidence. We do those, too. However, the proper aim is to examine how the various considerations are related: How can source criticism and archaeology be made to meet in a truly interdisciplinary approach?

8.2. Textual Evidence

The story of Absalom's revolt in 2 Sam 15–19 ends with the victorious King David returning from the other side of the Jordan and heading toward Jerusalem (19:19). Before David reaches Jerusalem, a dispute arises between Judah and Israel about who has the biggest “portion in David” (19:43). The dispute leads to another revolt: “Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite ... sounded the trumpet and cried out, ‘We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse! Everyone to your tents, O Israel!’” (20:1, NRSV). Having arrived home, David immediately begins preparations and aptly summarizes the situation: “Now Sheba son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom.” He commands Amasa, the former commander of Absalom's troops whom he promised to make commander instead of Joab, to gather troops for a new war (20:5; cf. 17:25, 19:14). The campaign starts slowly, and after a confusing set of events, the deposed Joab kills Amasa and takes the lead (20:6–10).

1. Izaak J. de Hulster, and Tuukka Kauhanen. “Abel and Dan (2 Sam 20:18–19) in Textual Criticism, Tradition History, and Archaeology,” *Textus* 30 (2021): 7–27.

Meanwhile, Sheba has been gathering troops and has reached Abel-beth-maacah. Either he is unaware of being pursued or he believes he is able to defend himself in the city, because he takes no action and allows Joab to besiege Abel. When Joab's forces start to batter the walls, the following exchange takes place—according to the Masoretic Text (MT):

(20:16) Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, I want to speak to you.'" (17) He came near her; and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." He answered, "I am listening." (18) Then she said, "They used to say in the old days, 'Let them inquire at Abel'; and so they would settle a matter. (19) I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel; why will you swallow up the heritage of the LORD?" (20) Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! (21) That is not the case! But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David; give him up alone, and I will withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head shall be thrown over the wall to you." (22) Then the woman went to all the people with her wise plan. And they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, and all went to their homes [tents], while Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king. (NRSV)

This ends the story of Sheba's revolt. It is followed by a short note about David's officials. The Succession Narrative is continued only in 1 Kgs 1, while the rest of 2 Samuel consists of "Miscellanies."

Throughout chapter 20, the MT contains signs of slight corruption or late revision. One of the more striking differences between the MT and the LXX can be seen in two verses of the wise woman's words (2 Sam 20:18–19). Our first question is:

1. *What does the wise woman say?*

The traditional approach to answer this question is *textual criticism*. It calls for finding out all the textual evidence, assessing the differences, and seeking to establish the direction of change. The aim is to find the reading closest to what the author originally wrote. In the study of the Hebrew Bible, it is not simply self-evident that there was one original author or reading in every instance. Some divergences between the witnesses do not find an easy explanation if one assumes they go back to a single archetype.

However, often the best explanation for the *similarities* between the witnesses is precisely that: as most of the time the existing witnesses agree word for word, they likely stem from a single common archetype *at least for those words*. The exact wording of that archetype will never be fully recovered—at least not for an entire biblical book, still less the entire Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, the concept of an *original* or *oldest attainable reading* is useful. In fact, the concept is implied in every study that takes textual criticism seriously instead of simply giving up in the face of textual variation. Every scholar who rejects the idea that anything goes is, by logical necessity, operating with the concept of an original reading.² Accepting this, however, does not force one to accept that there was a single copy of a fixed *Urtext* for each biblical book at some point.³

Let us approach question (1) by related questions:

2. What do the Hebrew witnesses read?

The standard edition *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) reports the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) as follows, with no major variation:

2 Sam 20:18–19a (BHS)

וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאמֹר דִּבֶּר יִדְבְּרוּ בְּרֵאשִׁיטָה לֵאמֹר שְׂאֵל יִשְׂאֵלוּ בְּאַבֵּל וְכֵן הָיָה:
אֲנִכִּי שְׁלָמִי אֶמְנוֹי יִשְׂרָאֵל

They used to say in the old days, “Let them inquire at Abel”; and so they would settle a matter. I am (one of) the peaceable of the faithful in Israel; ... (NRSV modified)

The text contains some grammatical oddities. The MT vocalization makes the last word of verse 18 a *hiphil* perfect (הָיָה). However, it has no object, while elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible *hiphil* תָּמַם usually has one (with object: 2 Kgs 22:4; Isa 33:1; Ezek 22:15, 24:10; Job 22:3; no object: Dan 8:23). One would rather expect *qal* for the meaning “to become completed”; here, concerning a dispute (or disputes) at hand: “to be/become settled.” In instances such as this, grammars and lexica tend to be highly prob-

2. In particular, this is the logical implication in the work of every scholar who forgoes textual criticism entirely and relies on the established text in one scholarly edition or translation!

3. For further reading, we recommend Ronald Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, TCS 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), especially chapters “What Is a Biblical Book?” and “The Epistemology of Textual Criticism.”

lematic. Usually they accept the MT at face value and explain the unusual forms as singular instances of an acceptable phenomenon.⁴ In addition, the entire half-verse 20:19a is grammatically problematic. It begins with *אֲנִי שְׁלָמִי*, ostensibly “I am of the peaceable.” One would rather expect *אֲנִי אֶחָת מִשְׁלָמִי**, “I am one of ...” (see, e.g., 1 Sam 1:1, 9:3). In addition, the construct chain “the peaceable of the faithful of Israel” is unusual. The considerations above have made many commentators in the past 150 years to consider the MT corrupt or, at least, troubled.⁵

The next step will be to see if witnesses in other languages, especially those of the Greek Septuagint, could provide plausible alternative readings.

3. What do the Greek witnesses read?

Most Greek witnesses present a considerably longer text than the MT. The text is given here first according to Rahlfs’s edition:

2 Sam 20:18–19a (Rahlfs)

(18) καὶ εἶπεν λέγουσα Λόγον ἐλάλησαν ἐν πρώτοις λέγοντες Ἡρωτημένος ἠρωτήθη ἐν τῇ Αβελ καὶ ἐν Δαν εἰ ἐξέλιπον ἃ ἔθεντο οἱ πιστοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραηλ, ἐρωτῶντες ἐπερωτήσουσιν ἐν Αβελ καὶ οὕτως εἰ ἐξέλιπον. (19a) ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰρηνικά τῶν στηριγμάτων Ἰσραηλ.

(18) And she said, saying, “A saying they spoke at first, saying, ‘When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel,’ and in Dan if they had abandoned what the faithful of Israel had established. ‘When inquiring, they shall inquire in Abel,’ and likewise if they had abandoned it. (19a) I am a peaceful one of the supports of Israel.” (NETS)

The underlined portion presents a double translation of one and the same Hebrew passage. It corresponds more faithfully to the MT: it retains the plural form of the Hebrew *figura etymologica* *יְשָׁלְמִי*; the original translation aptly uses passive singular *ἠρωτημένος ἠρωτήθη*. The later double translation provides an exact rendering for *וְכֵן*: καὶ οὕτως, “and likewise.” For the first words of 20:19, it provides a translation closely following the MT: (1) ἐγὼ εἰμι for *אֲנִי*; (2) εἰρηνικά “(one of) the peaceful” for *שְׁלָמִי*; (3) *στήριγμα* “support, foundation” for *מוֹנֵה*. The word *στήριγμα* is found

4. For instance, *DCH* 8:648 takes the present case as evidence for the meaning “settle a matter” for *תָּמַם*.

5. For example, Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel*, KHC 8 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902), 296: “Der Text des Capitels hat ungewöhnlich stark gelitten.”

nowhere else in the Greek Samuel in which Hebrew words featuring the root **מנח** are translated exclusively with πιστός (5x; here οἱ πιστοί), πιστεύω (2x), ἀλήθεια (3x), or ἀληθινός (1x).

It is safe to deduce that the translation originally ended with οἱ πιστοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.⁶ At an early stage, someone added a double translation corresponding to what can now be found in the MT, but with small details that set it apart from the translational profile of the original translator of the books of Samuel. Usually such doublets are added before the old translation but for some reason here it was appended after it.

Not all scholars, however, accept that the longer reading of the LXX is a doublet, that is, a double translation of a Hebrew passage. Recently Nadav Na'aman argued that the essence of the saying would be that, when asking for an oracle in both Abel-beth-maacah and Dan, one would get the definitive reply at Abel and not in Dan. Na'aman translates the long Greek reading thus: "Make (prophetic) inquiry in Abel and in Dan whether they had omitted what the faithful of Israel established. (Then) they made (prophetic) inquiry at Abel, and so they settled it."⁷ Na'aman concludes:

The LXX makes perfect sense as it suggests that the query was put forward in two neighbouring towns, Dan and Abel, but the definitive response was received at Abel. Hence, I doubt whether the LXX reflects a double translation. With all due caution, I tend to support the priority of the LXX, and assume that the first part of the original Hebrew text was omitted in the MT due to homoioteleuton.⁸

We noted above that some features of the wise woman's words in the doublet in the LXX manuscripts do not fit the usual usage of the original translator well. Moreover, the problems of the MT make it difficult to sug-

6. This is accepted by many commentators, esp. Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871), 297; Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament 1: Josué, Juges, Ruth, Samuel, Rois, Chroniques, Esdras, Néhémie, Esther*, OBO 50 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 297–99; P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 428–29.

7. Nadav Na'aman, "Source and Composition in the Story of Sheba's Revolt (2 Samuel 20)," *RB* 125 (2018): 340–52. Translation on p. 347; Hebrew portions are omitted from the translation.

8. Na'aman, "Source and Composition," 347–48.

gest that there once existed a Hebrew form of text of which the LXX, as found in the manuscripts, could be a translation. Thus we find it methodologically impossible to give any further source-critical, narrative-critical, or historical thought to the Greek double reading. It was brought about by a Hebraizing revision at an early stage of transmission in the Septuagint, probably in the first century BCE, and it never existed in a Hebrew text. It tells nothing about the composition or redactions of Samuel, the historical surroundings of Sheba's revolt, or Iron Age Abel or Dan. That the resulting double reading can be interpreted in a way that makes sense, even perfect sense, is not an argument toward its originality.

However, Na'aman's article must be commended for a fresh combination of textual, narrative, and source criticism with archaeological and historical considerations. In addition, we want to recognize that it was his article precisely that prompted us to consider the historical plausibility of the implied setting of the readings "Abel" in the MT and "Abel and Dan" in the LXX in light of the material evidence.

These considerations have brought the inquiry to textual criticism of the Septuagint:

4. What did the Septuagint read originally?

In the forthcoming eclectic edition of the Greek 2 Samuel by Kauhanen,⁹ the main text will contain only the original part and the doublet will be given in the apparatus:

(18) καὶ εἶπεν λέγουσα Λόγον ἐλάλησαν ἐν πρώτοις λέγοντες Ἡρωτημένος
 ἡρωτήθη ἐν τῇ Ἀβὲλ καὶ ἐν Δὰν εἰ ἐξέλιπον ἃ ἔθεντο οἱ πιστοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.
 fin V M a 121^{txt} f 71 158 245 707]¹⁰ + ἐρωτωντες ἐπερωτησουσιν ἐν ἀβελ
 καὶ οὕτως εἰ ἐξέλιπον ⁽¹⁹⁾ ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰρηνικά των στηριγματων ισραηλ B A
 247 L C b^{-121txt} d s 29 55 244 318 342 460 554 Ra

9. Tuukka Kauhanen, ed., *Regnorum liber II (Samuelis II)*, SVTG 5.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

10. The apparatus shows that two uncial manuscripts, *Venetus* (V) and *Coislianus* (M), and ten minuscule manuscripts do not contain the doublet. This fact is not mentioned in de Hulster and Kauhanen, "Abel and Dan," 9. When preparing that article, Kauhanen still assumed V M etc. had dropped the doublet out due to a homoioteleuton error, the eye of a copyist skipping from the word Ἰσραήλ in v. 18 to the same word at the end of the doublet. After a more thorough analysis, Kauhanen now concludes that the manuscripts in question should be noted as textual evidence for the original

And she said: “They spoke a saying in former [days], saying, “When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel and in Dan, whether what the faithful of Israel had established, had been abandoned.” [“When inquiring, they shall inquire in Abel,” and likewise if they had abandoned it. I am a peaceful one of the supports of Israel,] ...” (our trans., partly based on NETS)

A brief note on our translation is in order. In our punctuation, the saying quoted by the wise woman includes the entire sentence, “When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel and in Dan, whether what the faithful of Israel had established, had been abandoned.” We take the sense to be that the right answer, worthy of what the faithful of Israel had established, was to be inquired of in either Abel or Dan. However, we acknowledge the possibility of dividing the sentence to make a juxtaposition between a right answer in Abel and a heretical one in Dan: “When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel; and in Dan (only) if what the faithful of Israel had established had (already) been abandoned.” NETS interprets the syntax differently and ends the quotation after “Abel”: “A saying they spoke at first, saying, ‘When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel,’ and in Dan if they had abandoned what had established the faithful of Israel.”

Recognizing the doublet (“When inquiring, they shall inquire in Abel,’ and likewise if they had abandoned it. I am a peaceful one of the supports of Israel”) is the most important text-critical finding here. However, there is variation within the suggested original Greek text. In evaluating those variants, it is important to know that the latter part of 2 Samuel (10–24) contains one of the so-called kaige sections in Samuel-Kings. In these sections, *Codex Vaticanus* (B) and the majority of the manuscripts attest to the Hebraizing kaige revision. The Lucianic (or Antiochene) text, represented by the manuscript group *L*, is mostly free from the influence of the kaige revision but contains a much later revision of another kind. The original translation has to be reconstructed by comparing the readings of the manuscripts and contrasting them with the translational choices in the nonkaige section of Samuel (1 Sam 1–2 Sam 9). Indeed, in these verses the most notable inner variation is found in *L*:

shorter text. The manuscripts attesting the doublet include the uncials *Vaticanus* (B), *Alexandrinus* (A), the Lucianic text (*L*), and the clear majority of the manuscripts.

2 Sam 20:18 (*El texto antioqueno*)¹¹ καὶ εἶπε Λόγος ἐλαλήθη ἐν πρώτοις λεγόντων Ἡρωτημένος ἡρωτήθη ἐν τῇ Ἀβέλ καὶ ἐν Δάν εἰ ἐξέλιπεν ἃ ἔθεντο οἱ πιστοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ ...

The Lucianic reviser changes λόγον ἐλάλησαν “a saying they spoke” to the more appropriate passive λόγος ἐλαλήθη “a saying was said.” In addition, the reviser omits the preceding λέγουσα as unnecessary. In the reading ἐξέλιπον “they had abandoned” of B and the majority of the Greek manuscripts, ἃ ἔθεντο can be interpreted as the object (“if they had abandoned what had been established”) or as the grammatical subject (“if what had been established were to cease”). In Septuagint Greek, a plural predicate for a neuter plural subject is tolerated,¹² and the verb ἐκλείπω can be used intransitively; thus, it seems more natural to take ἃ ἔθεντο as the subject rather than an object, as reflected in our translation above. The singular ἐξέλιπεν in the Lucianic text makes it clear that ἃ ἔθεντο is the grammatical subject. The Lucianic reviser tends to change the predicates for neuter plural subjects to singular.¹³ The above considerations explain the variation between the reconstructed eclectic Greek text and the Lucianic text.

5. What Hebrew form of the text does the Septuagint translate?

Now that the original Greek translation has been established, it can be translated back into Hebrew to arrive at an approximate base text of the Septuagint.¹⁴ It will be easiest to compare the texts in parallel columns:

11. Natalio Fernández Marcos and José Ramon Busto Saiz, eds., *El texto antioqueno de la Biblia Griega: Samuel* (Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, 1989).

12. Henry St. John Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint* (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), 23: “Neuter plurals may take either a singular or plural verb.”

13. Sebastian P. Brock, *Recensions of the Septuaginta Version of 1 Samuel*, *Qua-derni di Henoch* 9 (Turin: Zamorani, 1996), 248–49.

14. The following retroversion, already anticipated by Julius Wellhausen, was first presented word-for-word by Dominique Barthélemy and adopted by P. Kyle McCarter. Dominique Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila: Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophète*, VTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 72, 122–23; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 426, 428–29.

	MT (BHS)	LXX base text (Barthélemy, McCarter)	LXX (Kauhanen)
18	שאל יִשְׁאֵלוּ בְּאֵבֶל וְכֵן : הִתְמוּ	שאל ישאלו באבל ובדן התמו	Ἡρωτημένος ἠρωτήθη ἐν τῇ Ἀβέλ καὶ ἐν Δάν εἰ ἐξέλιπον
19	אֲנֹכִי שְׁלָמִי אֲמוּנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל	אשר שמו אמוני ישראל	ἃ ἔθεντο οἱ πιστοὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.
18	“They used to say in the old days, ‘Let them inquire at Abel’; and so they would settle a matter.		They spoke a saying in former [days], saying, “When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel and in Dan, whether
19	I am (one of) the peaceable of the faithful in Israel; ...” (NRSV modified)		what the faithful of Israel had established, had been abandoned.” (our translation)

6. How and why do the Hebrew and Greek texts differ?

Many of the differences between the MT and the LXX base text are related to the presence or absence of the proper noun “Dan.” The difference between “and so” (וְכֵן) in the MT and “and in Dan” (וּבְדָן) in the LXX base text can be easily explained by a graphical error from one to another: a *bet-kaph* confusion and a quasi-dittography or haplography of *dalet* and final *nun*. The possibility of a graphical error, however, does not reveal which reading is primary and which is secondary: an error could happen either way.

In the tentative base text of the Septuagint, *he* in the last word of verse 18 (הִתְמוּ) should be pointed as an interrogative particle. That makes the verbal form *qal*, and the particle suggests the sentence continues: “Let them inquire ... whether it has been settled (or: carried out) that ...”

In the beginning of verse 19, a graphical confusion between אֲנֹכִי שְׁלָמִי “I am (one of) the peaceable of” and אֲשֶׁר שְׁמוּ “what (they) had established” is not as obvious as with “Dan” above. A graphical mistake would require a somewhat damaged surface or otherwise poor conditions, but

there are enough letters of the same (*aleph*, *shin*, *mem*) or similar (*kaph-resh*, *yod-vav*) shape to suggest one on the basis of the other.

7. Which is the original or older reading?

McCarter accepts the reconstructed base text of the LXX as closest to the original Hebrew.¹⁵ Barthélemy, however, defends the MT: while the reading is difficult, it is coherent with acceptable Hebrew usage, and to introduce Dan in the reading would be unnecessary for the proverb. While somewhat abrupt, the sentence break “they would settle a matter. I am one of...” is plausible as the juxtaposition “I am one of the peaceable ... whereas you [= Joab] seek to destroy” functions well rhetorically.¹⁶ Curiously, the most extensive analysis of the problem so far, published by Robert P. Gordon in *Vetus Testamentum* in 1993, leaves the question open:

The MT is intelligible, which means that emendation to agree with the LXX's alternative reading is a questionable solution to the “problem”... In our present state of knowledge we can but take note of both readings, allowing at the same time for the possibility that the absence of Dan from the MT has a polemical explanation. And if polemic were involved, the superiority of the assumed Greek *Vorlage* would scarcely be in doubt.¹⁷

Against Gordon, we maintain that the intelligibility of the MT does not justify putting *problem* in quotation marks: the problem is not whether the MT could be understood, even if with some trouble. The problem is the textual variation and a solution to that must be sought for. It is not satisfactory to only “take note of both readings.” As the difference in all likelihood goes back to corruption, and not polemics, only one of the two—or three—readings can be original.

15. Similarly, Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*, 297; Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977), 371–72.

16. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle*, 297–99; see also Barthélemy, “La qualité du Texte Massorétique de Samuel,” in *The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Samuel: Proceedings of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies and the Society of Biblical Literature, Pseudepigrapha Seminar*, ed. Emanuel Tov (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1980), 1–44.

17. Robert P. Gordon, “The Variable Wisdom of Abel: The MT and Versions at 2 Samuel XX 18–19,” *VT* 43 (1993): 226.

Because of the already broad scope of this chapter, we leave it to others to cover narrative critical arguments concerning especially the putative bi-sectioning of the Sheba story, as suggested by Naʿaman. Likewise, we have not included any analysis of the various interpretations of the saying in important ancient sources, especially the targumim and the Peshitta.

So far we have: established the original reading of the LXX (question 4), found a plausible retroversion from it to Hebrew (question 5), and observed the differences between that putative Hebrew base text of the LXX and the MT (question 6). We have noted that the scholarly opinion is divided when it comes to deciding between those two forms of text (question 6). We observed that graphical confusion, especially that between וכן “and so” (MT) and ובדן “and in Dan” (LXX base text), has a part to play. However, there is a host of other considerations when evaluating how and why the text changed in either direction. Indeed, a truly interdisciplinary investigation should aim at more than simply finding out, “What does the wise woman say?” (question 1). Observing the textual differences and evaluating the direction of change can lead to entirely new questions that are valuable in their own right. The words of the wise woman are situated in a story that depicts a historical setting—even if it is completely imaginary. That historical setting involves real settlements, Abel-beth-maacah and Dan, city walls, women on city walls, wise women, and possible oracular practices.

8.3. Abel and Dan from an Archaeological Perspective

The fact that ancient writings exist today implies that something happened in history. However, based on the narrative itself, we do not know what happened. The narrative can be somewhere on the scale between an eyewitness report, which is already distorted by interpretation and representation of the event, and a purposefully created fiction. Both ends of the scale may deserve their narratological appreciation, but one can also try to approach a text in light of material evidence in order to picture the circumstances under which the text emerged, that is, came into existence and possibly changed: the section above proves that our text has changed indeed. Beyond this observation about the existence of texts and the call for scrutinizing the historical circumstances—and events—implied in the text, we need to be aware of the genre of a text and what it might attempt to communicate. For a sharper focus: here we are dealing with a text that implies an explicit connection with history, giving the impression that

it narrates a historical event. The fact that such a narrative was written down and exists today implies that what is narrated must have been meaningful and functional.¹⁸ Andrew Vaughn pleads for a mere positive, open approach to historical texts rather than a skeptical one; thus one is able to imagine better the historical background as well as what is narrated and to appreciate the message of the narrative.¹⁹ Here we need to be aware of the fact that every present can shape its past, even by inventing past events.²⁰

Before turning to the material evidence, a brief reflection on the concepts of *narrative plausibility* and *historical plausibility* is in order. Although the terms narrative and historical plausibility have been used in different contexts, for the present purpose we understand narrative plausibility as the internal consistency of the story. Historical plausibility, on the other hand, is evaluated against external factors: How plausible is the depicted event in light of historical evidence outside the narrative? Considering the historical plausibility of a story does not imply that the story had a historical nucleus. It does not need to imply that the author of the story thought that the events depicted actually took place. Thus, historical plausibility comprises a spectrum of scenarios in more general terms: Is it plausible that the events depicted could have happened? Could the author have known them? How would an author in the Persian period have depicted Iron Age events? How would readers of another period have imagined the Iron Age setting? We seek to use historical plausibility to assess what

18. Volumes could be written on the prolegomena. The above considerations are based on Izaak J. de Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah*, FAT 2/36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 37–38 (with references) and written reflecting on Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Köln: Böhlau, 2013); Juan L. Fernandez, “Story Makes History, Theory Makes Story: Developing Rüsen’s *Historik* in Logical and Semiotic Directions,” *History and Theory* 57 (2018): 75–103; Kristin Asdal and Helge Jordheim, “Texts on the Move: Textuality and Historicity Revisited,” *History and Theory* 57 (2018), 56–74; Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte denken: Erläuterungen zur Historik* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2020); and Rüsen, “A Turning Point in Theory of History: The Place of Hayden White in the History of Metahistory,” *History and Theory* 59 (2020): 92–102.

19. Andrew G. Vaughn, “Can We Write a History of Israel Today?,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. Alan Millard and James K. Hoffmeier (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 368–85.

20. From the angle of cultural memory: Izaak J. de Hulster, “Extending the Borders of Cultural Memory Research?,” in *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Pernille Carstens, Trine Bjørnung Hasselbalch, and Niels Peter Lemche, PHSC 17 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2012), 95–135.

the authors or redactors of a historical narrative produced. In particular, we seek to use it to evaluate whether either version—the MT or the LXX base text—of the wise woman's words is more plausible. In the context of the words of the wise woman, historical plausibility pertains especially to: Does the woman speak of just "Abel" or "Abel and Dan"? Beyond that there are many related historical questions: Can Abel and Dan be identified archaeologically? What was the size and economic, sociopolitical, and military importance of these cities, especially in biblical times? Then, a number of historical questions become relevant in light of the narrative context: If "inquiring" (20:18) would imply an oracle, is there any evidence for such? Was Abel, at least partially, fortified with a wall? When, if at all, were sieges part of Iron Age offense strategy? Further historical questions are tied to the plot of the narrative: Did Sheba flee to Abel, or did he choose it as a new seat of government? Why did Sheba choose Abel? What historical and narrative reasons accord with the identification of Abel as Israelite? And in light of our emphasis on source criticism: what historical, material, and ideological differences between Abel and Dan may have contributed to Abel's role in the narrative? On the one hand, we have asked questions that might sustain a historical core; on the other hand, there are questions that possibly diminish the historical plausibility, such as: How unique are the motifs of a woman on the wall and the wise woman? What literary and iconographic evidence of those motifs is there? Are the events described unique enough to assume a historical core?

Thus beyond the question of a possible historical nucleus, we need to take into consideration possible other scenarios for the origins of the text—for example, emerging from or partly being influenced by literary or iconographic motifs. We would also like to consider in which periods the reading mentioning both "Abel and Dan" would most likely have been understood.

Texts were written by humans in a certain place, at a certain time in history. These people had their own cultural heritage, including collective memories and motifs. Therefore, in order to better understand the possible origins of 2 Sam 20, we will concentrate on the most important considerations related to this historical question, especially within the chronological framework of late Iron Age I and Iron Age IIA, that is, the tenth to the ninth centuries BCE: topography, material culture, the existence of an oracle, and women on city walls as a motif. It is important to be aware of the fact that the material-cultural remains through which we reconstruct historical circumstances are incomplete: not everything sur-

vives the ravages of time and among what survives, not everything has been excavated. Even what has been excavated is subject to interpretation and reevaluation.

The previous section ended with question 7: “Which is the original or older reading?” In this section, the same notion is approached from a different angle:

8. What would the author have written?

In order to respond to this question, it is essential to know about the circumstances of the author (and redactors). Therefore, the next subsections approach question 8 from various angles: general historical considerations, including topography (8.3.1); material evidence of the cultural and political situation (8.3.2); evidence for an oracle (8.3.3); the motif of women on city walls (8.3.4); and the narrative function of Abel and Dan (8.3.5).

8.3.1. Topography and Historical Reconstruction

9. Where were biblical Abel and Dan located?

Most scholars agree that Tell Abil el-Qameh, just south of present-day Metula (the most northern town in the present State of Israel, located on the border with Lebanon) is to be identified with Abel-beth-maacah and that Tell el-Qadi (6–7 km slightly to the southeast of Abel) contains the remains of ancient Dan; it is named “Tel Dan” on Israeli maps.²¹

21. Identifications/surveys of Tell Abil-el-Qameh were carried out during the nineteenth century by Victor Guerrin and Edward Robinson, in the 1960s by Yehudah Dayan, in 1973 by William Dever, and in 1990–1992 by Idan Shaked and Yosef Stefansky. After a survey in 2012, an excavation began in 2013, directed by Nava Panitz-Cohen, Naama Yahalom-Mack and Robert Mullins. Only Edward Lipiński and Zvi Ma'oz have suggested the identification of Tell el-Qadi with Abel-beth-maacah; Edward Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion*, OLA 100 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 372–73; Zvi U. Ma'oz, *Dan Is Baniyas: Teldan Is Abel Beth Ma'acha*, Archaostyle Scientific Research Series 2 (Qazrin: Archaostyle, 2006). Among the arguments for identifying Tell Abil-el-Qameh as Abel-beth-maacah is the word “Abel” preserved as “Abil” in the name of the village Abil-el-Qameh that existed until halfway through the twentieth century. On Tel Dan, see Avraham Biran, “Dan,” *NEAEHL* 1:323–32; Biran, *Biblical Dan* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994); Biran, “Dan: An Update to Vol. I, pp. 323–332,” *NEAEHL* 5:1686–89; David

10. What were the conditions in Iron Age Abel and Dan like?

The archaeological findings suggest that both Abel and Dan were fortified cities during the Bronze Age. We take this as the point of departure and in the meantime discuss other aspects of the larger question.

11. When was Dan fortified?

For Dan, the material evidence suggests a degree of discontinuity from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I. From a historical point of view, this might be linked with the withdrawal of the Egyptians from the area in 1140 BCE;²² however, evidence for an active Egyptian presence at Dan in the Late Bronze Age is contested.²³ During the whole of the Iron Age I (Strata VI, V and IVB) no fortifications can be observed; either there were none or none have been preserved.²⁴ In combination with other factors, such as a drought, the archaeological record testifies to several destructions, possibly earthquakes, during this period. Although Dan was inhabited during the entire Iron I, its population decreased at the turn from Iron I to Iron IIA but experienced a large-scale revival in the second half of the ninth century (Stratum IVA).²⁵ Stratum III shows the remains of massive fortifi-

Ilan, "Dan," *OEANE* 2:107–12; Ilan, "Dan," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology*, ed. Daniel M. Master, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 245–54; and see the following footnotes.

22. So, among others, David Ilan as one of the coauthors of David Kaniewski et al., "Supplementary Materials for Climate Change and Water Management in the Biblical City of Dan," *Science Advances* 3 (2017): table S2 and in his *Dan IV—The Iron Age I Settlement: The Avraham Biran Excavations (1966–1999)*, Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion 12 (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College Press, 2019), 637.

23. See Mario A. S. Martin and Rachel Ben-Dov, "Egyptian and Egyptian-Style Pottery at Tel Dan," *AeL* 17 (2007): 191–203; see also the discussion of Egyptian artifacts discussed in Andrew R. Davis, *Tel Dan in Its Northern Cultic Context*, ABS 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 27–28; Merja Alanne, "Tel Dan—Biblical Dan: An Archaeological and Biblical Study of the City of Dan from the Iron Age II to the Hellenistic Period" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2017), 57.

24. See David Ilan, "Household Gleanings from Iron I Tel Dan," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow, CHANE 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 133–54.

25. Eran Arie has an "occupational gap or insignificant settlement" between Iron IB and Iron IIB, ca. 980–830 (high chronology) or 950–800 (low chronology); "Recon-

cations, a large sacred precinct, and a densely populated city.²⁶ Despite the final report on the Iron Age I at Tel Dan, the material of Tel Dan continues to be interpreted and reevaluated and awaits final reports on other eras that might shed new light on the Iron Age I as well.²⁷

12. *When was Abel fortified?*

In contrast, the results of the ongoing excavation at Tel Abel-beth-maacah seem to imply that there was not only continuity in settlement from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, but that Abel was flourishing. Abel was a fortified city during the Bronze Age and perhaps into the early Iron Age I. However, during the Iron Age I, pits were dug into the tower and walls (see the evidence in Area F, the southern edge of the mound).²⁸ Therefore, we must conclude that the lower city did not have an effective fortification system by the end of the Iron Age I. It is hard to say anything conclusive about the upper city, as the presence of a few meters of rubble and two Israeli military bunkers complicate excavation; nevertheless, the most recent finds in Area B (located on the eastern slope of the upper mound, close to the summit) revealed part of a massive casemate structure, dated to the late tenth and ninth centuries, that appears to have been a citadel.²⁹

sidering the Iron Age II Strata at Tel Dan: Archaeological and Historical Implications,” *TA* 35 (2008): 6–64. High and low chronology is, among other things, an issue of how the archaeological evidence can be related to absolute dating. Although most scholars follow Arie’s hypothesis, the idea of a decrease and decline during most of the Iron IIA at Dan should be evaluated in light of the proper publication and interpretation of the archaeological evidence that is still in process.

26. Kaniewski et al., “Supplementary Materials for Climate Change,” esp. figure 3B (and see supplementary materials, esp. table S2 there); see Alanne, “Tel Dan,” 47.

27. Initial publications by Biran, e.g., *Biblical Dan*; Biran’s results are revised and reinterpreted, partly in light of more recent excavations: Arie, “Reconsidering the Iron Age II Strata”; Yifat Thareani, “Enemy at the Gates? The Archaeological Visibility of the Aramaeans at Dan,” in *In Search for Aram and Israel: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Omer Sergi, Manfred Oeming, and Izaak J. de Hulster, *ORA* 20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 169–97; Alanne, “Tel Dan”; and Ilan, *Dan IV*, 617, 631, 634, 639.

28. Nava Panitz-Cohen, Robert A. Mullins, and Ruhama Bonfil, “Second Preliminary Report of the Excavations at Tell Abil el Qameh (Abel Beth Maacah),” *Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 33 (2015): 35–59, esp. 44–47.

29. Naama Yahalom-Mack, Nava Panitz-Cohen, and Robert Mullins, “From a Fortified Canaanite City-State to a ‘City and a Mother in Israel’: Five Seasons of Excavation at Tel Abel Beth Maacah,” *NEA* 81 (2018): 145–56, esp. 152–55 and ongoing

The narrative setting of 2 Sam 20 is at the end of the Iron Age I or rather early in the Iron Age IIA.³⁰ Given Abel's status as an urban center, Sheba might have had good reasons to go to Abel. The narrative of Sheba's revolt mentions Joab's siege (v. 15) and the exchange between Joab and the woman calling from the city. These elements presuppose walls. Possibly, Sheba and the wise woman were in the upper city. From a different angle, one could argue that if there was a fortified place to withdraw or establish a seat of residence, Abel would have been the most likely place in the Galilee.

13. Which was more prominent, Abel or Dan?

These observations concerning Tel Dan, together with the destruction of the nearby cities of Hazor to the south and Kumidi to the north at the end of the Late Bronze Age, suggest that Abel grew in importance at the turn of the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Abel was likely the most prominent city in the region by the end of the Iron Age I.³¹ Abel has at least two major destructions in Iron I (apparently equal to the destructions at Dan in Strata V and IVB). After the destruction at the end of the Iron I (Stratum A2), the city was soon rebuilt and has been shown to have been a well-settled urban center. At the end of the Iron IIA, apparently sometimes in the late ninth century BCE, or at the latest the very beginning of the eighth century, occupation at Abel-beth-maacah ceased, as no clear Iron IIB occupation that could be dated to the eighth century, nor any traces of the Assyrian destruction, were identified in the excavations to date. Thus, there is evidence for intense occupation in the late tenth and

excavation. The final revisions of this contribution were made after the excavation season of summer 2021.

30. See Nava Panitz-Cohen and Naama Yahalom-Mack, "The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maacah," *BAR* 45 (2019): 33.

31. E.g., Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil, "Second Preliminary Report," esp. 56; and more recently, Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins, "From a Fortified Canaanite City-State"; see further references at <https://www.abel-beth-maacah.org/about-3-1>. Note that in our text above we include part of the Iron Age IIA, given the traditional start of this period at about 1000 BCE; however, for instance, David Ilan (excavator of Iron Age I at Tel Dan) dates the transition from Iron Age I to Iron Age II to about 950 BCE or even 900 BCE; moreover, the staff of the Abel-beth-maacah excavation prefers, archaeologically speaking, a date around 950 BCE.

ninth centuries, but after that in Iron IIB (eighth century) Abel seems to have been abandoned. This contrasts with Dan, where Iron Age IIB remains were excavated and studied in detail, revealing a significant rise in material culture.³² This rise of Dan possibly started later in the Iron Age IIA given the building of gates (in Area A), some of which were apparently not finished before the Iron Age IIB building activities were started, which followed a new plan.³³

Although the archaeological data from Abel-beth-maacah are being collected still and only allow preliminary conclusions, nevertheless, we try to visualize the present stage of research in the following figure³⁴ (fig. 1), based on the reports and observations in the field that are currently being interpreted.³⁵ The rise and fall of a city, for instance, depends on numerous factors (and how they are weighed), such as population, fortification, relative importance in the region, trade contacts, industry, prosperity, and the like, not to mention catastrophes such as military invasions or earthquakes.

32. For the Neo-Babylonian period there is no evidence of occupation at Tel Dan; during the Achaemenid period activity seems to have concentrated around the cult precinct (Area T) and likewise during the Hellenistic period, for which there are indications of light occupation.

33. David Ilan, "Iron Age II Et-Tell/ Bethsaida and Dan: A Tale of Two Gates," in *A Festschrift in Honor of Rami Arav: "And They Came to Bethsaida..."*, ed. Fred Strickert and Richard Freund (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 118.

34. This figure was also part of our article in *Textus* (de Hulster and Kauhanen, "Abel and Dan," submitted early 2020); the 2020 report of Dan's Iron Age I by David Ilan showed that Dan by the Late Bronze Age–early Iron Age I was more important than concluded during the research for the earlier version of the figure.

35. Esp. Kaniewski et al., "Climate Change"; Panitz-Cohen, Mullins, and Bonfil, "Second Preliminary Report"; and Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins, "From a Fortified Canaanite City-State." We would like to thank here Naama Yahalom-Mack, Robert Mullins, and especially Nava Panitz-Cohen for our discussions and their clarifications in light of the most recent assessments of the archaeological data, in particular for Abel-beth-maacah (January 2020). We also thank David Ilan for our exchange on the history of Dan. We are, of course, solely responsible for what is written here. Due to the pandemic, in 2020 there was only a short season; the results of the short 2020 excavation season are still awaiting further analysis and therefore, at the moment, do not change the observations offered here—archaeological work is always preliminary and contingent.

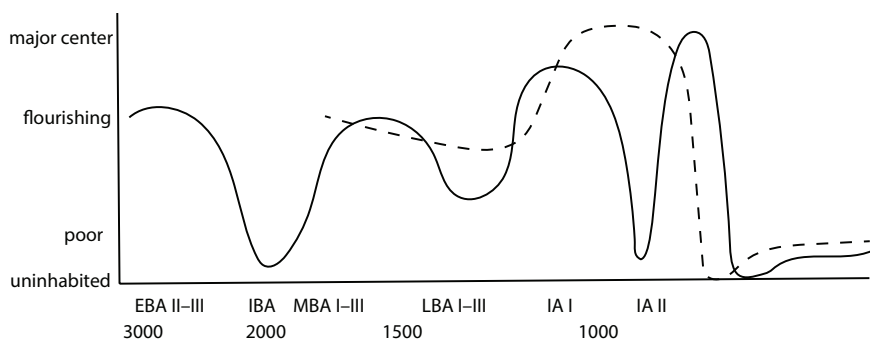


Fig. 1. Sketch of the development of Dan (continuous line) and Abel-beth-maacah (dashed line). The dashed line starts in MBA II, as for the periods before we have no data yet. The scale does not allow to show catastrophes from which a city quickly recovered. EBA: Early Bronze Age; IBA: Intermediate Bronze Age; LBA: Late Bronze Age; IA: Iron Age; NB and Achaemenid: Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods.

14. *Since when did armies in the ancient Near East or Levant practice siege warfare?*

According to the scholarly consensus, the story speaks about siege warfare. The material culture of Palestine does not testify to siege warfare before the second half of the ninth century (if it was part of Hazael's conquest of Gath) or with the Assyrian conquest by the end of the eighth century.³⁶ The scenario does not necessarily presuppose a siege: Joab might have attacked the wall of the upper city straightaway without using a siege ramp. Thus we turn to the question:

15. *Does the story speak of siege warfare?*

Could the verb צור or the phrase סללה אל־העיר have a broader meaning than the technical term for siege warfare? There are at least two options

36. Aren M. Maeir and Shira Gur-Arieh, "Comparative Aspects of the Aramean Siege System at Tell es-Sāfi/Gath," in *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 229. Cf. Omer Sergi, "The United Monarchy and the Kingdom of Jeroboam II in the Story of Absalom and Sheba's Revolts (2 Samuel 15–20)," *HBAI* 6 (2017): 340.

for additional scenarios, one in redaction criticism and one in semantics. Starting with the latter, the meaning of the verb *וַיִּשְׁפְּכוּ* and the phrase *סִלְלָה אֱלֹהֵי־עִיר* could have narrowed down to a technical term for siege warfare.³⁷ From a redaction-critical point of view:

16. Is the notion of siege warfare a redactional feature?

A later redactor of the story may have introduced the verb *וַיִּשְׁפְּכוּ* and the phrase *סִלְלָה אֱלֹהֵי־עִיר*. Maybe without the concept of anachronism, he would have rephrased the story into terms that—from the perspective of our historical reconstruction—did not fit the past he was dealing with.

8.3.2. Material Culture: A Perspective on Cultural and Political Affiliation

17. What does the word “Israel” mean in the narrative?

The woman speaks about “a city that is a mother in Israel” (NRSV). If the woman used the word *Israel* at all, what reference might have been envisioned? The first evidence for the name Israel as *gentilicum* is its mention on Merenptah’s Victory Stela dated to 1208 BCE, now in the Cairo Museum (JE 31408); as a personal name it is much older.³⁸ The meaning of Israel, marked by a hieroglyph as a *gentilicum* in JE 31408, is not clear. During the Iron Age I, the name was possibly related to people living in the Galilee.³⁹ The next two occurrences of Israel in reference to a people are the Kurkh Stela (now in the British Museum, BM 118884) that mentions Ahab as an Israelite and the Mesha Stela (now in the Louvre, AO5066).

37. Language can change, as the diachronic approach to semantics (for Greek, in particular Koine Greek, see Chrys C. Caragounis, *New Testament Language and Exegesis: A Diachronic Approach*, WUNT 323 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014]) shows; an explicit example is the reflection of the redactor on the word “seer” in 1 Sam 9:9.

38. Izaak J. de Hulster, “Das Berliner Steinfragment ÄM 21687—die älteste Bezeugung der Volksbezeichnung ‘Israel’?,” *Göttinger Miszellen: Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion* 255 (2018): 67–80, esp. 67.

39. See William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, vol. 2 of *Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 40–41. Koert van Bekkum, however, cautions that one cannot be more specific than “Canaan,” the territory of the Ramesside province of Asia; see *From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel’s Settlement in Canaan*, CHANE 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 204–29, 564–72.

Both are references to the Northern Kingdom; from a biblical perspective this could be linked with “the ten tribes.”⁴⁰ Israel Finkelstein takes the mid-ninth century occurrences as a starting point. Despite evidence for Israel as a name of the Northern Kingdom, he does not reach a clear conclusion about the continuity of the name with earlier polities (since 1100 BCE) or possibly the name as mentioned in the Merenptah Stela.⁴¹ However, Israel, as defined by Finkelstein, does not include Abel and Dan: the most northern city would be Hazor. It is not possible to identify Israel as a Hebrew-speaking group of people that venerates Yahweh. One needs to investigate and interpret Israel for each context, in which it occurs.⁴² Moreover, there is no material culture that can be linked with a possible Israel—no pots to prove the existence of a specific people.⁴³ Nevertheless, we briefly address the question of a specific Israelite Iron Age material culture in northern Galilee, with special attention to Abel and Dan in their historical context. We do so in relation to the narrative level and therefore first introduce the question:

18. *Why did Sheba choose Abel?*

Choosing Abel as a place of refuge or as a seat of the new rebel government (see question 33 in §8.3.5 below) might be related to the identification of Abel as an Israelite city; at least the story implies that Abel was Israelite. In light of the context of the succession narrative, at least for the reader during the divided monarchy, this leads to the methodological question:

19. *How can Abel be identified as Israelite in a certain period?*

Publications by Yifat Thareani and de Hulster are among the latest assessments of Iron Age culture(s) north of the Hula Lake, known today as the

40. Hallo and Younger, *Context of Scripture*, 261–64, 137–38.

41. Israel Finkelstein, “First Israel, Core Israel, United (Northern) Israel,” *NEA* 82 (2019): 8–15; cf. Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, ANEM 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 74–75.

42. Fabio Porzia, *Le peuple aux trois noms: Une histoire de l'ancien Israël à travers le prisme de ses ethnonymes*, OBO 298 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022).

43. This would require preliminary work on culture, ethnicity, the possible connection of the two, as well as labels; Izaak J. de Hulster, “Ethnicity and ‘the Myth of the Reborn Nation’: Investigations in Collective Identity, Monotheism and the Use of Figurines in Yehud during the Achaemenid Period,” *Approaching Religion* 4 (2014): 16–24.

Hula Valley.⁴⁴ It is not possible to distinguish here an Israelite culture, nor is there evidence for a distinctive Aramaean material culture. Both acknowledge northern influence and, given the excavated finds she focuses on, Thareani underlines the local element of the material culture, in her case at Dan.⁴⁵ The material culture north of the Hula Lake seems to have been fairly unified during the Iron Age I and II. This unity could be taken as evidence for a predominantly Israelite inhabitation of the area, a population that finds continuation in the inhabitants of the Iron Age II Northern Kingdom.⁴⁶ This observation would fit the stories of the rivalry between Israel and Aram-Damascus in 2 Sam 8 and passim in 1 Kings. Such a specific material culture north of the Hula Lake may also fit the statement in Josh 13:13 that the Geshurites and Maacathites lived among the Israelites—or, the Israelites among them. We hardly need to add that this observation in no way proves that the aforementioned stories in the Bible are historically true; however, the findings enhance the historical plausibility of the setting of Sheba's revolt.

20. *Was Abel Israelite?*

An author living in or aware of the Iron Age I and early Iron Age IIA surroundings north of the Hula Lake would have been able to depict the setting for the story easily. Moreover, the story is a witness of a tradition or memory that took Abel-beth-maacah as an Israelite town.

We will now turn back to the overarching questions of the historical circumstances and an estimate of the importance of Abel and Dan, in relation to each other and in the region.

21. *How can Dan be identified as Israelite in a certain period?*

It seems that Dan in all periods for which this question might be answered was rather a melting pot of coexisting culture groups, much

44. Izaak J. de Hulster, "Material Aramaeisms? Sphragistic Reflections on the Aram-Israel Border Zone through a Case Study on Hazor," in Sergi, Oeming, and de Hulster, *In Search for Aram and Israel*, 229–50; Thareani, "Enemy," 169–97.

45. Thareani, "Enemy," 185 and de Hulster, "Material Aramaeisms."

46. In 2020, the Tel Abel-Beth-Maacah Excavations published a ninth-century inscription from Area K in Hebrew identifying *Benya(h)u*, someone with a Yahwistic name, as the owner of a wine jar; see Ariel David, "Hebrew Inscription on a 3,000-Year-Old Jar Could Redraw Borders of Ancient Israel," *Haaretz*, 12 January 2020.

more so than the influences that can be distinguished in other Galilean cities, such as Abel. From the eleventh century onward, the pluralism of a multiethnic society seems to have been part of the likely self-identification of Dan's population—in Stratum V still as an egalitarian society, but from the tenth century onward with a more hierarchical power arrangement with less clear boundaries between the various groups of inhabitants.⁴⁷

22. How does the label Israel as used in the story fit the historical circumstances at Abel and Dan?

In sum, it is hard to say what Israel would have meant but when comparing Abel and Dan, Abel is the better candidate for such an identification and therefore—apparently—also the better fit in the narrative.

23. Why would Dan be mentioned next to Abel in a certain period?

Thus, from the end of the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age IIA, Abel seems to have gained in regional significance over Dan. Abel was apparently abandoned at the end of the Iron IIA, while the subsequent Iron Age IIB saw a revival of Dan.⁴⁸ This leads to several possible competing scenarios depending on the historical surroundings around the proverb, the revolt, and the original and revised forms of the story:

- ♦ If the Sheba story stems from—or depicts—late Iron Age I (or rather early Iron Age II) conditions, Abel would have been the most notable city in the area and a likely place to feature the proverb cited by the wise woman. In that scenario, the later rise of Dan from the ninth century onward would have prompted a copyist or redactor of the story to introduce Dan in the proverb.

47. Ilan, *Dan IV*, 627–31, summarizes his observations on Dan in a section “Cultural Origins and Social Identities.”

48. This formulation follows Arie, “Reconsidering the Iron Age II Strata”; this does not contradict the inconclusive observations by Biran (as elaborated by Alanne, “Tel Dan,” esp. 47; cf. Biran, “Dan: An Update,” 1688) and largely corresponds with David Ilan’s take in his “Dan” (2013); David Kaniewski et al., “Climate Change and Water Management in the Biblical City of Dan,” *Science Advances* 3 (2017), esp. figure 3B; and Kaniewski et al., “Supplementary Materials,” esp. table S2.

- ◆ Alternatively, if the story is somewhat later, Dan would have been a prominent city and part of the original story.
- ◆ It is possible that the story, or its historical kernel, was written down during a period in which Dan was significant and Abel was remembered as the origin of the story, for which reason Dan would have been added into an earlier written version. Such a model fits the eighth century, a time commonly mentioned for the writing down of the story.⁴⁹
- ◆ Alternatively, if it was written down during a later period in which Abel might have been more important than Dan (e.g., the Achæmenid period), Dan would have been added during a time in which it had gained significance again. Likewise, one could search for reasons to drop Dan while rewriting the text, for example, in relation to its importance or—speculatively—in light of condemning its cultic importance (in practice or in memory).⁵⁰
- ◆ Because the wise woman from Abel uses a proverb in which both Abel and Dan are mentioned, it is possible that the proverb stems from an earlier period, earlier in the Iron Age I or before, during which both cities were prominent.

8.3.3. Oracle

24. *Was there an oracle in Abel or Dan?*

We will approach this question from two angles: what the text says and what the historical and archaeological evidence suggests.

25. *Does the text speak of an oracle?*

Two elements in the text might suggest an oracle: the phrase “inquire” (ἠρωτημένους ἠρωτήθη / וְשָׁאַל וְשָׁאַל, v. 18) and the wise woman herself, especially the word “mother” (אִמָּה, v. 19).⁵¹

49. See the arguments in Sergi, “United Monarchy,” 340.

50. See Gordon, “Variable Wisdom of Abel,” quoted above; see also §8.4 below.

51. Naʿaman, “Source and Composition,” 347–51; cf. Panitz-Cohen and Yahalom-Mack, “Wise Woman.”

26. *Does inquire indicate an oracle?*

The phrase “inquire” (ἠρωτημένος ἠρωτήθη / יִשְׁאַל יִשְׁאַל) has been understood in reference to an oracle and also the wise woman herself has been understood in relation to an oracle, independent of the next question about “mother.”

27. *Does the word translated “mother” (מִאִם) refer to the role of the wise woman in the context of an oracle, whether as a homonym, an honorary title, or a metaphor?*

Interestingly, whereas most male scholars understand the phrase “a mother and a city” in verse 19 as “metropolis” (LXX: μητρόπολις) or some other type of a city, most female scholars understand “a mother in Israel” as denoting a prophetess or the main representative of oracle practice.⁵² Andrew Steinmann takes the word *mother* as a “double entendre.”⁵³ Based on Judg 5:9, “a mother in Israel” may well be a wise woman or a prophetess. Some might speak in this context of an oracle;⁵⁴ although this term is possibly infelicitous, we have adopted this pithy concept to name our subsection and to phrase its leading question.

52. Among the male authors, e.g., August Klostermann, *Die Bücher Samuelis und der Könige* (Nördlingen, Germany: Beck, 1887), 233; Otto Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels*, Kurzgefaßtes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament 4 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1898), 192–93; Smith, *Books of Samuel*, 371; P. A. H. de Boer, “The Counsellor,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley*, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 60; A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC 11 (Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 241; Georg Hentschel, *2 Samuel*, NEB 34 (Würzburg: Echter, 1994), 89; André Caquot and Philippe de Robert, *Les livres de Samuel*, CAT 6 (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestle, 1997), 571; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Das zweite Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar*, BWANT 181 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 210; and Ernst-Axel Knauf, *Richter*, ZBK 7 (Zurich: TVZ, 2016), 75. Among the female authors: Marcia L. Geyer, “Stopping the Juggernaut: A Close Reading of 2 Samuel 20:13–22,” *USQR* 41 (1986): 38; Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteslehrerinnen: Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 59; Shawna R. B. Atteberry, *What You Didn't Learn in Sunday School: Women Who Didn't Shut Up and Sit Down* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2013), 9.

53. Andrew Steinmann, *2 Samuel*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2017), 391.

54. Yahalom-Mack, Panitz-Cohen, and Mullins, “From a Fortified Canaanite City-State,” 145.

This brief examination yields a cautious positive answer to question 24: the text probably speaks of an oracle. The examination will then turn to the material evidence:

28. What historical and archaeological observations speak against or in favor of an oracle in Abel or Dan?

In the Abel excavations, evidence of cultic prominence has been found in three occupational strata of Area A: a cultic building with *masseboth*, large standing stones interpreted as cultic from the early to middle of the eleventh century; a cultic space with a unique drainage installation, an offering table, stelae, mortars and a cult stand dated to the late eleventh and early tenth century; and a jar containing 406 astragali (animal knucklebones) of sheep goats and deer dated to the late tenth or early ninth century.⁵⁵ Likewise, several finds at Dan might relate to cultic and divinatory activity. For instance, the so-called snake house, a remarkable vessel with a window, could be linked with an oracle.⁵⁶ It is unclear, however, what is needed to conclude the existence of an oracle. Does an oracle require a large sanctuary? Or could there be an oracle that left no trace in the archaeological record at all—only the woman, perhaps with persons in her lineage, representing the oracle? While one could point to the existence of certain objects to enhance the historical plausibility of both Abel and Dan as places for an oracle, the material remains are not specific enough.

In sum, it is entirely possible that the population of Abel and Dan had practices that today could be described with the English word *oracle*.

8.3.4. The Motif of Women on City Walls in Iconography and Literature

In the beginning of §8.3, we mentioned the motifs a woman on the wall and the wise woman as features that affect the historical plausibility of the

55. Panitz-Cohen and Yahalom-Mack, “Wise Woman,” esp. 33. Astragali were widely used in antiquity for games but also for divinatory practices. The latter is argued for in Matthew Susnow et al., “Contextualizing an Iron Age IIA Hoard of Astragali from Tel Abel Beth Maacah, Israel,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 34 (2021): 58–83.

56. Wolfgang Zwickel, “Dan,” *Wiblex: Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/16185>. The vessel is called a *snake house* because vessels of similar shape had terracotta snakes attached to them; for references, see also Biran, *Biblical Dan*, 152–53; and Alanne, “Tel Dan,” 58.

story. Are those features commonplace or something unique to the Sheba story? Where did the author find those motifs—or more generally:

29. What sources did the author have, and how did he use them?

The sources available to the author—generally stated—included archaeological remains, oral and possibly written history, invented history, and art: literature and iconography. We discuss these in more detail below.

30. How did the author imagine the surroundings of the narrative and the scene on the wall?

Here, especially, the spectrum of historical and literary factors plays a role, as these influence or affect the way the author (or editor) imagines and describes (or reformulates) the scene. More specifically, for instance, the question of when armies began to practice siege warfare in the ancient Near East or Levant (question 15 in §8.3.1) needs to be considered here as well; a (later) author may have rephrased the events in his own words, anachronistically, or the language may have integrated new meanings or used terms with more exclusive meanings (question 16 in §8.3.1).

While the narrative references entities, such as Abel-beth-maacah, that can be the object of historical and archaeological research (see §8.3.2), the narrative does not necessarily need to be based on a specific event. Therefore, we investigate the possibilities of traditions and motifs that might have influenced the way the text has been shaped.

31. How unique are the motifs of a woman on the wall and the wise woman?

Assessing the uniqueness requires first an answer to:

32. What literary and iconographic evidence of those motifs is there?

Besides 2 Sam 20:14–22, women on city walls are featured in two other stories in the Bible: the mother of the cooked son in 2 Kgs 6:26–29 and the woman with the mill stone that killed Abimelech in Judg 9:53. Notably, all the three are war stories and the narrative settings are reminiscent of the wise woman at the gate in Prov 1:20–21 and 8:2–3. In addition, scholars have compared the wise woman in 2 Sam 20 with the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14); such a comparison can lead to an argument about

whether the one story is dependent on the other,⁵⁷ calling into question the historical singularity of the narrated event. The role of women in these stories is significant. Nevertheless, scholars who argue for the similarity of the stories mentioned above usually do not pay attention to the women in 2 Sam 17 (the maidservant, v. 17 and the wife in Bahurim, vv. 18–21). Including 2 Sam 17 in this comparison stresses the role of women in the larger narrative—apparently narratives featuring women have a place in the larger composition. It is too complicated to discuss the nature of the material here: Do we encounter traditions brought together, motifs or narratives combined, or newly written material—or perhaps a mixture of all these? Possible facts and tentative fiction are hard to separate here. Therefore, a comparison between 2 Sam 14 and 20 does not necessarily make an argument that either the stories were written—or the related events were selected—because of the role women play(ed). Probably Sheba's claim for the throne was important enough to be reported; the narrative about the wise woman of Abel fits well with the others in which women play a crucial role.

The motif of a woman on a wall also appears in visual art. Silvia Schroer, having studied 2 Sam 20 in various contexts, published an article in which she presents ninth-century reliefs of Assurnasirpal II and scenes on the bronze Balawat Gates of his son Shalmaneser III. These images feature women on walls in times of war, but unlike 2 Sam 20, these women are lamenting, wailing, or mourning.⁵⁸ Considering a possible influence from a motif, one needs to consider that a motif can be turned upside down: a wise woman on the wall is the antitype of weeping women on the wall.

57. E.g., Jan Wim Wesselius, "De wijze vrouwen in 2 Samuël 14 en 20," *NedTT* 45 (1991): 89–100; Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 14–29; and Larry L. Lyke, *King David with the Wise Woman of Tekoa: The Resonance of Tradition in Parabolic Narrative*, JSOTSup 255 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 165–68.

58. The reliefs and the gates are now in the British Museum (BM 124554 and BM 124683 respectively). See Silvia Schroer, "Die weise Frau auf der Stadtmauer von Abel-bet-Maacha (2Sam 20,14–22)," in *Seitenblicke: Literarische und historische Studien zu Nebenfiguren im zweiten Samuelbuch*, ed. Walter Dietrich, OBO 249 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 394–411. Schroer had erroneously identified a figure as a woman throwing a stone but corrected this in a later publication; see Silvia Schroer, "No Woman on the City Wall of Hamanu: A Note of Correction," *lectio difficilior* 1 (2018), tinyurl.com/SBL03116b.

33. *Are those motifs unique enough to assume a historical core?*

The notion that stories might be dependent one on the other, leads to the question of which was first. Used in many stories, a motif can grow. A narrative can be based on this literary motif, but various ways of relating the past can also use motifs to select the material, for example, bringing material featuring women together. Would the motifs, by their frequency, speak for invention and thus make historicity doubtful? Or did the motif function as a selection criterion for choosing existing material, such as legends, or for narrating more recent events? As such, and in light of the narrative and historical plausibility of the narrative in 2 Sam 20, we conclude that we cannot deny the *possibility* of historicity.

8.3.5. Abel and Dan in the Narrative

Beyond these questions more directly related to the wise woman from Abel, there is an overarching question about how the story evolves at Abel and possibly in relationship or comparison to Dan:

34. *Did Sheba flee to Abel, or did he choose it as a new seat of government?*

Despite Abel's reputation of being Israelite (see question 20) and its role as a center in the northern Galilee, its location at the border rather suggests a place of refuge than for a new seat of government. In addition, there was a direct motive for a flight: Joab's pursuit campaign. Even as a place of refuge, the Israelite Abel with its citadel might have been ideologically and strategically a logical choice for Sheba.

In §8.2, we presented the reading "and Dan" as the main text-critical issue. Here, at the end of the survey on the material evidence, it is time to establish again the connection with the literary world:

35. *What is the role of Dan in the narrative?*

The role of Dan in the narrative is rather minor. In §8.2, we noted two possibilities of interpretation of the words of the wise woman in the Septuagint—please note the placement of the quotation marks:

2 Sam 20:18 A saying they spoke at first, saying, "When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel," and in Dan if they had abandoned what the faithful of Israel had established. (NETS)

2 Sam 20:18 They spoke a saying in former [days], saying, “When inquired of, one was inquired of in Abel and in Dan, whether what the faithful of Israel had established, had been abandoned.” (our trans., partly based on NETS)

In the former interpretation, Dan serves as the negative counterpart to Abel; in the latter, both Abel and Dan are presented as equally faithful cities.

8.4. Methodological Encounter

Above, we have considered the following questions in a linear mode, given by the textual nature of the article—we bring these together in the figures that follow:

1. What does the wise woman say?
2. What do the Hebrew witnesses read?
3. What do the Greek witnesses read?
4. What did the Septuagint read originally?
5. What Hebrew form of the text does the Septuagint translate?
6. How and why do the Hebrew and Greek texts differ?
7. Which is the original or older reading?
8. What would the author have written?
9. Where were the biblical Abel and Dan located?
10. What were the conditions in Iron Age Abel and Dan like?
11. When was Dan fortified?
12. When was Abel fortified?
13. Which was more prominent, Abel or Dan?
14. Since when did armies in the ancient Near East or Levant practice siege warfare?
15. Does the story speak of siege warfare?
16. Is the notion of siege warfare a redactional feature?
17. What does the word Israel mean in the narrative?
18. Why did Sheba choose Abel?
19. How can Abel be identified as Israelite in a certain period?
20. Was Abel Israelite?
21. How can Dan be identified as Israelite in a certain period?
22. How does the label Israel as used in the story fit the historical circumstances at Abel and Dan?
23. Why would Dan be mentioned next to Abel in a certain period?

24. Was there an oracle in Abel or Dan?
25. Does the text speak of an oracle?
26. Does inquire indicate an oracle?
27. Does the word translated “mother” (מִאֵם) refer to the role of the wise woman in the context of an oracle, whether as a homonym, an honorary title, or a metaphor?
28. What historical and archaeological observations speak against or in favor of an oracle in Abel or Dan?
29. What sources did the author have and how did he use them?
30. How did the author imagine the surroundings of the narrative and the scene on the wall?
31. How unique are the motifs a woman on the wall and the wise woman?
32. What literary and iconographic evidence of those motifs is there?
33. Are those motifs unique enough to assume a historical core?
34. Did Sheba flee to Abel, or did he choose it as a new seat of government?
35. What is the role of Dan in the narrative?

The following two method figures map important connections between the questions and how they are situated in respect to the traditional methods. Lines mark directly interconnected questions. Mostly, the lines can be traced in one direction, so that one question will lead to another. However, the line of inquiry can often go in either direction. The elliptical areas A–E (first figure) and D–H (second figure) mark the rough boundaries of the traditional methods or research topics.

Starting from the textual perspective, the question “What does the wise woman say?” (1) naturally leads to an inspection of the Hebrew witnesses (2). Textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible (area A) requires taking into account the Greek witnesses (3) which, in turn, leads to the basic question of the textual criticism of the Septuagint (area B): “What did the Septuagint read originally?” (4). That question cannot be solved by the Greek witnesses alone, but the underlying Hebrew base text (5) needs to be considered. To reconstruct the Hebrew base text of the Septuagint, a translation-technical investigation (C) is needed. Please note that there is always a two-way connection between questions 4 and 5: the answer to one will necessarily affect the answer to the other. The textual inquiry will culminate in the comparison of the extant textual sources and an explanation of the differences (6). When successful, the text-critical investigation

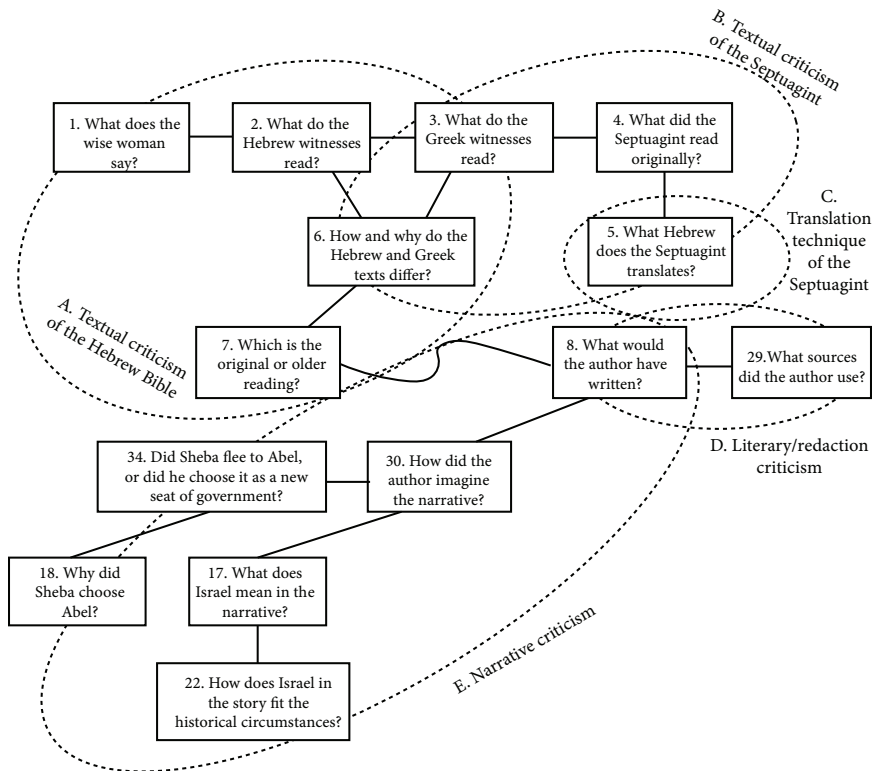


Fig. 2. Interrelations of questions related to textual criticism, translation technique, literary and redaction criticism, and narrative criticism.

will result in establishing the original reading or, at least, the oldest of the competing readings (7).

The original or older reading is closest to “what the author would have written” (8). In essence, questions 7 and 8 ask the same thing—represented with the doubly curved line—but those two questions are approached from different directions. From question 8, the investigation can proceed to literary and redaction criticism (D) with the question “What sources did the author have and how did he use them?” (29). When building on existing sources, the author is a redactor as well; and in most cases the sources can only be reconstructed by reasoning related to the motivations of the authors and redactors. That makes questions 8 and 29 heavily interconnected.

Regardless of possible underlying textual sources, the author is writing a narrative. Thus, the author must have in mind a setting for the depicted

events. Assessment of the author's imagination belongs to the field of narrative criticism (E). In this field, our questions become more specific. It may be helpful to approach the lower part of the figure first by locking the answer to questions 7 and 8 to only "Abel" (thus the MT) or "Abel and Dan" (LXX). The narrative critical questions start with "How did the author imagine the surroundings of the narrative and the scene on the wall?" (30). The author's imagination is related to the purpose of Sheba's movements (34). The question "Why did Sheba choose Abel?" (18) and not another, possibly a neighboring city as a place of refuge or a new seat of government is connected with the status of Abel as an Israelite city. What does Israelite mean in this context? That question starts to approach the material world. We first ask, "What does the word Israel mean in the narrative?" (17) and then, "How does the label Israel as used in the story fit the historical circumstances at Abel and Dan?" (22).

Meanwhile, the historical circumstances have influenced the author's, or possibly authors' over time, imagination in various ways; thus, imagination does not only play a role from a narrative angle in relation to constructing a setting and a plot, but for a narrative with a historical character it delineates how circumstances and traditions are perceived and given a place in the composition.

The question "How did the author imagine the surroundings of the narrative?" (30) forms a bridge from the textual world to the material world. The author's imagination can only be properly assessed in relation to archaeological and iconographical evidence of the time depicted. Various elements play a role here: circumstances of the time and place of composition, the author's knowledge and imagination of the past, and the author's culture with its literary motifs and ideas. Language, too, must be considered. These considerations are not limited to the author, but they can be extended to subsequent redactors as well.

"What were the conditions in Iron Age Abel and Dan like?" (10) is a broad question that is broken down to multiple geographical and historical considerations. Most of those require archaeological knowledge (area F). Any investigation of the material world will necessarily have to establish first the location of the sites: "Where were the biblical Abel and Dan located?" (question 9). The significance of the wall in the narrative leads the reader to wonder when these cities were fortified (11, 12). The city wall serves as a stage for the exchange between the wise woman and Joab, but it may be related to Sheba's activity, too: Sheba may have had good reason to retreat to a fortified city. This forms a loop back to narrative criticism (E)

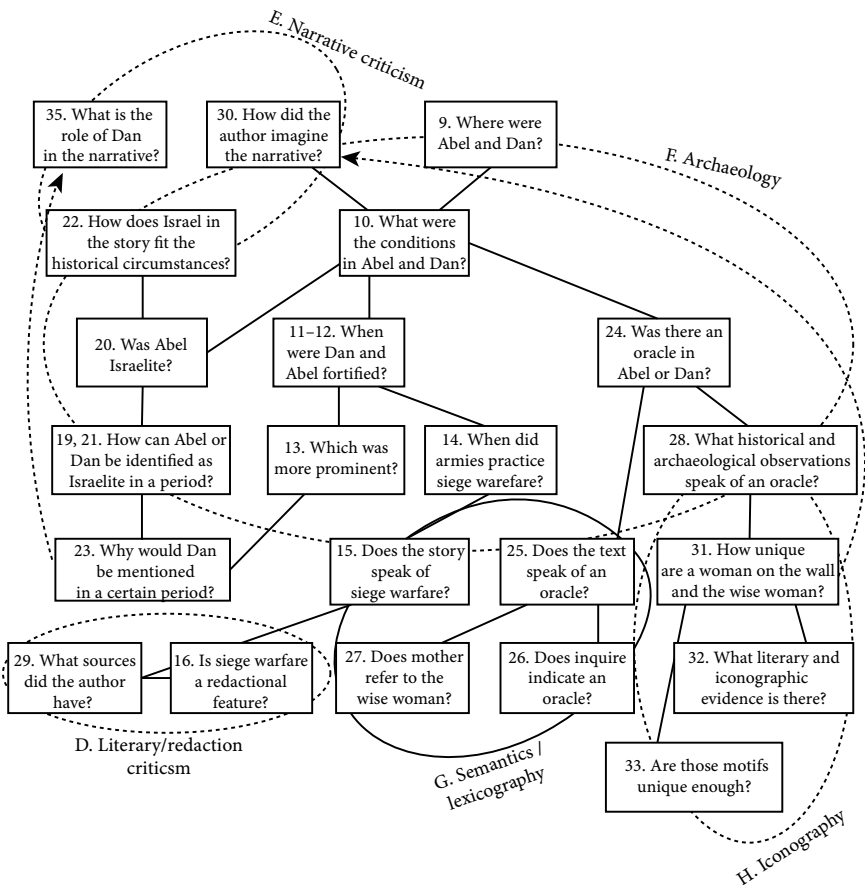


Fig. 3. Interrelations of questions related to literary and redaction criticism, narrative criticism, archaeology, semantics or lexicography, and iconography.

and the question, “Why did Sheba choose Abel?” (18 on method figure 2 above). Regardless of the original purpose of Sheba’s campaign or retreat, the narrative assumes that Abel was an Israelite city. Questioning if Abel was actually “Israelite” (question 20) expects archaeological and historical criteria for establishing an ethnic identity Israelite, and methods for recognizing Abel or Dan as such (questions 19, 21). Walls are a sign of and a reason for the prominence of a city (13)—a possible criterion to evaluate why Dan, a prominent city in the Iron Age II, would be included in or excluded from the story (23). That consideration has a strong link back to narrative criticism: “What is the role of Dan in the narrative?” (35).

Furthermore, the wall of Abel is related to Joab's siege preparations (2 Sam 20:15) which, in turn, lead to question 14, "Since when did armies in the ancient Near East or Levant practice siege warfare?" Establishing whether the story actually speaks of siege warfare (question 15) connects history and archaeology with semantics and lexicography (G). Investigating whether the notion of siege warfare would be a late redactional feature (16) brings the inquiry back to the realm of literary and redaction criticism (D).

One line of questioning concerns the oracle and the related theme of the wise woman: "Was there an oracle in Abel or Dan?" (24); "What historical and archaeological observations speak against or in favor of an oracle in Abel or Dan?" (28). In addition to material evidence concerning an oracle, such as astragali, ancient depictions may shed light on the possible oracular role of wise women. They bring the investigation to the realm of iconography (H). The questions put forward in this line of investigation touch upon both the material and the textual world. Due to limitations in paper size, iconography is located quite far away from narrative criticism (E) on our figure. However, question 31, "How unique are the motifs 'a woman on the wall' and the wise woman?," is tied to narrative criticism—this is signified with a feedback loop to question 30. Question 32, "What literary and iconographic evidence of those motifs is there?," explicitly connects both the textual and iconographic evidence with the material world. After assessing the uniqueness of the motifs a woman on the wall and the wise woman, one line of investigation can end in an evaluation whether they are "unique enough to assume a historical core" (33).

Another line of investigation concerning the oracle (question 24) inspects the semantics of the expressions possibly related to divination practices. Questions in this area (G) are mostly related to lexicography, but they can be considered a part of the larger area of the study of semantics.⁵⁹ The question "Does the text speak of an oracle?" (25) can be broken down into more specific questions about the phrase "inquire" (26) and the word "mother" (27). The latter is connected with the assessment of the possible status of Abel as a metropolis, as interpreted in the LXX (σὺ δὲ ζητεῖς θανατῶσαι πόλιν καὶ μητρόπολιν ἐν Ἰσραήλ, 2 Sam 20:19); thus, it

59. In the present case, the difference could be illustrated as follows: *Lexicography* concerns the possible connotations of "inquire" and "mother" overall. *Semantics* concerns the range of meanings of the said words in the present context.

leads back to archaeology (F) and the circumstances in Iron Age Abel and Dan (question 10).

8.5. Conclusion: “Abel” or “Abel and Dan”?

Does the preceding discussion allow us to choose between the text forms “Abel” in the MT and “Abel and Dan” in the putative base text of the Septuagint? From a text-critical point of view, the latter should perhaps be preferred:

- ♦ The variant text-forms שאל ישאלו באבל וכן התמו אנכי שלמי אמוני (MT) and שאל ישאלו באבל ובדן התמו אשר שמו אמוני ישראל (LXX base text) are graphically quite close to each other, which suggests that the variation was brought about by a series of graphical mistakes, possibly due to material damage in an archetype.
- ♦ In particular, the confusion between the MT וכן and the reconstructed *ובדן very likely results from a graphical mistake. That the direction was from *ובדן to וכן is suggested by the latter being a much more common word.⁶⁰ Then again, “Abel” may have caused a scribe to think of a nearby geographical name which caused the reading error from *ובדן to וכן.
- ♦ When variation is brought about by conscious revising, the secondary text is bound to be smoother or, at least, less difficult. However, when the variation is due to transcriptional issues, one may expect the secondary form to be grammatically more difficult, as the MT form clearly is here.

Archaeology suggests Abel as a plausible place for the setting of the story, while not suggesting Dan to be a completely unsuitable place (an oracle is not necessarily in an urban center).⁶¹ The later diminishing in importance

60. In the Hebrew Bible, דן occurs 65 times and בן occurs 750 times; in the historical books specifically, דן occurs 39 times and בן 163 times.

61. Note with Panitz-Cohen and Yahalom-Mack, “Wise Woman,” 31, that wise women (as local traditions) mainly play a role in the pre- and early monarchic period *at the periphery*. Interestingly, they seem to have read Na’aman’s article, writing: “Although our Wise Woman herself was not necessarily a divinator or spiritual leader, tradition places her in a town—and a nearby region, if we add Dan, as the Septuagint and the archaeological evidence do—characterized as having a long reputation for wisdom and faithfulness to the tradition of Israel” (33); they do not make a clear argument for Dan, apparently following Na’aman’s eighth century date.

of Abel and the rise of Dan make it plausible that Dan could have been introduced in the story by a reviser or, at least, a creative copyist. Such a change could have been partly prompted by bad copying conditions: וכן, or a garbled version of it, would be more likely to be read as וברן if Dan was considered a prominent place by the copyist. This suggestion is in diametrical opposition to the one by Gordon, who would allow for “the possibility that the absence of Dan from the MT has a polemical explanation,”⁶² namely, that the name Dan was omitted because of it being associated with idolatry in 1 Kgs 12 and 2 Kgs 10. If the proverb is interpreted as making a juxtaposition—good advice in Abel, bad in Dan—the name “Dan” could have been added precisely in order to polemicize against it.

As for archaeological evidence, we must consider various historical situations that contribute to the story. The proverb, assuming its authenticity, is supposed to be the first layer present in the story. There is no evidence from the Bronze Age to confirm or to deny the possibility of oracles and their traditions—which would have grown, in the end, into a proverb—at Abel or Dan during this period. For those who relate cultic evidence with the probability of an oracle, we can point out that the record of Abel testifies to cultic activity during most of the Iron Age I.

The second historical situation is the end of the Iron Age I or rather the beginning of the Iron Age IIA, the setting of the story. At this time, Abel was an important city, whereas Dan was less significant. This situation changed during the Iron Age II. Most scholars date the story to the eighth century. Beyond the textual evidence, archaeological evidence of motifs employed in the narrative testify to changes in the story; siege warfare, for example, would have made its appearance in Israel/Palestine only in the ninth or late eighth century.

We have combined various considerations to shed light on a textual problem: (1) textual criticism of the Septuagint, including translation technique; (2) transcriptional probability in the Hebrew square script; (3) Hebrew syntax; (4) the possibility of revision due to religious or political polemics; (5) archaeological findings in Iron Age Abel and Dan; (6) historical plausibility of fortifications, siege warfare, women on walls, and existence of an oracle in Abel and Dan; and (7) the literary and iconographic motifs of a wise woman and of a woman on the city wall from a tradition-historical point of view.

62. Gordon, “Variable Wisdom of Abel,” 226.

Our primary aim was to map the various historical and text-historical possibilities. Although we have taken into account considerably more archaeological information than previous studies, the material does not allow for one clear conclusion concerning the date of the first composition, nor about when Dan would have been added or omitted for conscious reasons or by scribal mistake. We have tried to elucidate—even if only to a small extent—the complexities involved in the narrative of 2 Sam 20. The data presented here underline the variety of elements present in the narrative and the growth of the story, and the caution and courage required to tackle texts like 2 Sam 20.

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9

Textual Criticism Meets Gender Criticism: The Characterization and Interactions of Elijah, Jezebel, and Ahab

Patrik Jansson and Timo Tekoniemi

9.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the characterization and interactions of Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel in 1 Kgs 18, 19, and 21(20) from the perspectives of gender and textual criticism. From the standpoint of gender, these characters are a highly interesting trio. Prophet Elijah, who is represented as having an abundance of strength and confidence in chapter 18, is forced to flee to the wilderness after receiving a threatening message from Jezebel. King Ahab, on the other hand, is represented as a weak and easily persuaded figure. Finally, as a queen and a foreign woman, Jezebel not only influences the events and the actions of Ahab but also opposes Elijah with great efficacy. Hence, it is important to understand how their behavior both subverts and upholds the expectations and conventions that are related to gender in the biblical context. This, of course, is not a new topic in scholarship, as various articles and books have assessed these characters from the standpoint of gender while also utilizing observations from diverse fields and frameworks such as postcolonialism or studies of humor.¹

1. Helena Zlotnick, "From Jezebel to Esther: Fashioning Images of Queenship in the Hebrew Bible," *Bib* 82 (2001): 477–95; Amy Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Hilary Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, HBM 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 125–50; Cat Quine, "Bereaved Mothers and Masculine Queens: The Political Use of Maternal Grief in 1–2 Kings," *Open Theology* 6 (2020): 407–22; Melissa

The understanding of the term *biblical context*, however, has, since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, been in a continuous state of flux, even on a textual level. Today it is commonly agreed that as late as the beginning of the Common Era, the text of the Hebrew Bible had not yet become consolidated into one canonical and authoritative work.² Such a comprehensive text—the Masoretic Text (MT)—only came to be at a later date. In the case of the books of Kings, moreover, it was already shown at the end of the nineteenth century that the Masoretic version of the text had clearly gone through substantial editing when compared with other ancient textual witnesses, most notably the Septuagint.³ Therefore, since the Septuagint often contains earlier readings and earlier versions of the narratives in Kings, it is important to take its text into account when assessing questions pertaining to the biblical text and its context. This way, it is sometimes possible for the scholar to map out how ideas about gender, for instance, developed during these formative last centuries BCE.

This chapter argues that when combined, the perspectives of gender and textual criticism can provide new well-founded insights into these complex texts and characters. The focus on gender helps to evaluate the characters' behavior and traits and to observe whether adherence to certain ideals is seen as positive or not. At the same time, textual criticism brings much-needed insight into an endeavor that could risk being too focused on the reading of the Masoretic Text.⁴ As the characters have

Jackson, "Reading Jezebel from the 'Other' Side: Feminist Critique, Postcolonialism, and Comedy," *RevExp* 112 (2015): 239–55; Jackson, "Reading Jezebel"; Helen Paynter, "Ahab—Heedless Father, Sullen Son: Humour and Intertextuality in 1 Kings 21," *JSOT* 41 (2017): 451–74.

2. Emanuel Tov, "Understanding the Text of the Bible Sixty-Five Years after the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Open Theology* 1 (2014): 95: "The Qumran scrolls show us that textual divergence was the rule rather than the exception at Qumran. These scrolls ... display a textual variety that must have been characteristic of Israel as a whole in the period between the third century BCE and the first century CE.... When these scrolls were written, the concept that scrolls should be identical simply did not exist in most of Israel."

3. See Timo Tekoniemi, *The Textual History of 2 Kings 17*, BZAW 536 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 2–11. The Qumran finds have further highlighted the need for full evaluation of all textual material in our possession.

4. Beatrice Lawrence, "Gender Analysis: Gender and Method in Biblical Studies," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, RBS 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 333–48. Lawrence notes: "Literary criticism is the dominant

multiple aspects to them and interactions that are noteworthy from the perspective of gender, it is important to see if these vary between different versions of the text (and thus also between the different contexts in which the texts were written). Indeed, as will be shown in this chapter, certain traits and interactions affecting the gendered representations of the three main characters have been changed in the proto-Masoretic tradition from the earlier Old Greek text.

9.2. Perspectives of Gender

In this chapter, gender criticism is defined and applied as a broad perspective that directs its focus onto the behavior and relationships of biblical characters and compares them against the notions of masculinity and femininity that are presented in biblical and other ancient texts. This aim is comparable to the use of gender criticism/analysis as suggested by scholars such as Beatrice Lawrence and Ken Stone, especially highlighting actions that diverge from the cultural norms of the time. In other words, the aim is to identify situations where men and women are somehow unable or unwilling to conform to particular gender ideals or where they act in a way that is not typical of their gender in the given culture. That is to say, women behaving in a manner that was considered masculine, or vice versa, are of special interest to this kind of analysis.⁵

methodology for these studies because of its emphasis on final-form reading and the ease with which postmodern thought can find voice in literary analysis” (336).

5. Ken Stone, “Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 183–84, states that, “instead of studying ‘men’ or ‘women’ as such, gender criticism analyzes critically the cultural notions and social processes that function not only to differentiate ‘men’ from ‘women,’ but also to differentiate men or male characters from other men or male characters, and some women or female characters from other women or female characters. It also highlights instances in which gender takes unexpected forms or fails to conform to dominant assumptions, including the widespread assumption that gender can always be understood in strictly binary terms (e.g., male versus female, or masculine versus feminine). Refusing to be confined by this assumption, gender criticism even explores such gender-related topics as ‘female masculinity’ or intersexed bodies—hardly conventional objects of analysis for either ‘men’s studies’ or ‘women’s studies’ as traditionally practiced.” This definition has also been utilized by Meredith Stone, *Empire and Gender in LXX Esther*, EJL 48 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 51. Lawrence, “Gender Analysis,” 335, discusses the aims of gender analysis in a manner that is comparable to the definition above by Ken Stone.

In order to apply this framework, it is necessary to know how gender was understood in the writing context(s) of the Hebrew Bible, how these views may have changed during the transmission process, and what were regarded as typical masculine or feminine ideals or types of behavior. From one perspective, there appears to be a binary conceptualization of sex and gender. God creates humankind as men and women, and these categories can thus be viewed as exclusive, meaning that the differentiation between genders is taken as an ideal.⁶ Conversely, situations that suggest the mixing of roles and expected behavior are viewed negatively.⁷ In other words, men and women are different and are generally expected to behave differently and occupy different areas of life. At times, these differences can be seen in terms of various and rather general dichotomies within the biblical texts: men and masculinity are associated with activity, open or public spaces, and women and femininity are relegated to passivity and private or domestic spheres.⁸

However, the texts may at times present a more complex picture that defies monolithic notions of ideal masculinity or femininity. For instance, the Hebrew Bible does not present a singular image of appropriate or inappropriate female behavior.⁹ This is to be expected, of course, as the texts of the Bible have been written and edited over hundreds of years, in various contexts, by numerous different people. Nonetheless, in the historical books, the majority of female characters, such as Hannah, Bathsheba, and even the queens of Israel and Judah, fall into the categories of mother or wife, with their respective duties. In the former category, ideals such as compassion or self-sacrifice are viewed as positive traits. In the latter, there is also an aspect of subordination to the husband. While a wife is capable

6. See S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study in the Book of Ezekiel*, LHBOTS 368 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 3–4; Hanne Løland, *Silent or Salient Gender? The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46, and 49*, FAT 2/32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 41–44.

7. See Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 7–9.

8. Susan E. Haddox, “Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades,” *CurBR* 14 (2016): 182.

9. Lipka, “Queen Jezebel’s Masculinity,” 145, notes that characters such as Rahab, Jael, and Deborah demonstrate qualities and traits that do not fit the passive gender performance of “woman.” Nevertheless, according to Lipka, such biblical women never completely transgress their feminine role. Hence the appropriateness of such gender performances likely depends on a multitude of various factors.

of independent actions, these actions should be directed toward supporting her husband.¹⁰

As far as Jezebel is concerned, it is necessary to understand what kind of behavior might possibly be expected of the wife of a king. First of all, there is an interesting question of authority and power. In the Hebrew Bible, only Athaliah, another evil queen,¹¹ is understood as a ruler queen, as the verb *mlk* is used of her actions. However, the sphere and potential authority of royal spouses seems to be vaguer. When mentioned in 1–2 Kings, the wives of kings are usually passed over with only brief remarks. There is a sense that women of that position can be active and evaluated positively, provided that the goal of that activity is to support the men without challenging their status and separate role.¹²

Additionally, it is important to note that Jezebel may not be defined only by her gender and status. She is also explicitly a foreigner and thus part of the common stereotype according to which foreign women are involved in idolatry and lead men to apostasy—as happened even to King Solomon. This means that Jezebel's actions may also be partly defined by what can be expected of a person of foreign origin.¹³ In other

10. Phyllis Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 18–19, 33–40. Bird argues that Abigail in 1 Sam 25 exemplifies the qualities of an ideal wife.

11. It is possible that we are to implicitly understand Athaliah to have also been an idolater, as she was the daughter of Omri or Ahab (the Greek manuscript evidence is not conclusive), one of the vilest idolater kings of Israel.

12. Stuart Macwilliam "Athaliah: A Case of Illicit Masculinity," in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, HBM 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 81. Gale A. Yee, *Poor, Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 48–52, notes that the power of women could often only be of an informal nature, exploiting certain aspects of the men's sphere, i.e., codes of honor. The fact that a woman in a biblical text would engage in scheming is the result of a lack of formal possibilities for expressing power or authority. Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, OTS 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 341, notes that a queen could gain additional authority depending on the standing of her home country.

13. Stephanie Wyatt, "Jezebel, Elijah, and the Widow of Zarephath: A Ménage à Trois that Estranges the Holy and Makes the Holy the Strange," *JSOT* 36 (2012): 441–43. However, even foreign women are not uniformly depicted in biblical texts or even in 1 Kings. An interesting counterpart for Jezebel in terms of foreignness could be the widow of Zarephath, who comes to acknowledge the God of Elijah. Neverthe-

words, Jezebel is a complex and intersectional literary/historical figure whose status and origin give rise to various and sometimes conflicting expectations.

But what about masculinity? In the context of gender criticism, masculinity should be understood as a trait with performative and relational aspects, not something that is essential, unchangeable, or inherent to all men.¹⁴ The most notable theoretical framework that informs the studies of biblical masculinities is the theory or model of multiple masculinities developed by R. W. Connell. In this theory, a society has an ideal form of masculinity that can be described as *hegemonic*. This ideal is supported by various institutions (military, government, etc.) that grant it the necessary authority.¹⁵ As the notion of hegemony is an ideal construct, it becomes obvious that men can easily fail to possess the traits that are considered hegemonic or ideal in a specific context. Connell has noted that men who are not able, for one reason or another, to conform to the hegemonic ideal or men who embody traits that are viewed as feminine can be understood as representing *subordinated* masculinity, which can lead to discrimination or exclusion. On the other hand, even those who mostly strive to adhere to hegemonic masculinity do not necessarily fulfil its every criterion but can gain some benefit from supporting its structures and conventions. Hence, hegemonic masculinity

less, Wyatt has noted that even in the narrative that offers a positive evaluation of such a character, the text contains ideas that suggest that foreignness is closely linked to negative attributes. Hence, she states that, “Language in the Hebrew Bible designating foreignness, prostitution, sorcery, and worship of non-Israelite deities form a complex web of identity-markers, where one idea subsumes the other, so much so that the concepts are indistinguishable, one from another” (452). In this case, Jezebel by default occupies a much more difficult position than other wives of biblical kings, as her foreignness in itself may imply transgression of (gendered) norms. Nevertheless, Maacah, a native queen mother of Judah (1 Kgs 15:10, 13), is also charged with idolatry (“making a horrid image to Asherah”), and therefore the idolatry of Jezebel should not be too tightly linked to her foreignness—especially since even most kings, in both kingdoms, are accused of inappropriate cultic behavior.

14. See, for instance, R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 71, who states that masculinity “is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture.”

15. Connell, *Masculinities*, 77. For an overview and history of the theoretical framework, see Stephen M. Wilson “Biblical Masculinities Studies and Multiple Masculinities Theory: Past, Present and Future,” in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, HBM 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 19–40.

requires *complicit* masculinities. Finally, Connell notes that masculinities of different ethnic groups can be viewed as *marginalized* in relation to the hegemonic ideal.¹⁶ While Connell's theory is concerned with contemporary issues of gender, scholarship has shown that the Hebrew Bible represents a wide variety of relational masculinities that can also be considered as hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, or marginalized.¹⁷

While the Hebrew Bible certainly contains various interrelated, contrasting, and conflicting masculinities, an important issue is again whether there are reliable criteria for assessing the masculinity of biblical characters. To this end, we employ the characteristics of masculinity as defined by Susan Haddox. These are: avoidance of femininity, potency that manifests as physical strength, virility, capability as a warrior, honor, and persuasiveness.¹⁸ A further characteristic or trait of masculinity that may be added to these ideas is self-control, especially when under threat.¹⁹

16. Connell, *Masculinities*, 76–81.

17. Martti Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 221–24; Wilson, "Biblical Masculinities Studies."

18. Susan E. Haddox, "Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, BMW 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 2–19, esp. 4–7. When discussing masculinity, Haddox utilizes the terms *characteristics*, *components*, *areas*, and *criteria* in an interchangeable manner. The characteristics listed by Haddox are largely comparable with the ones suggested by David Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 212–41, who focused on King David as a masculine ruler. The characteristics or traits of masculinity, according to Clines, are the ability to fight, persuade others, stay separate from women, bond with other males, musicality, and beauty. The two latter traits have been criticized, as beauty seems to be associated more with youth, and musicality does not seem to be a trait that can be linked to masculinity in general. For the critique of these traits of masculinity, see for example Will Briggs, "'A Man's Gotta Do What a Man's Gotta Do?': The Criticism of Hegemonic Masculinity in Judges 19.1–20.7," *JSOT* 42 (2015): 59; Hilary Lipka, "Shaved Beards and Bared Buttocks: Shame and the Undermining of Masculine Performance in Biblical Texts," in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (New York: Routledge, 2016), 188; and Stephen D. Moore, "Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, BMW 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 249–50.

19. See, for instance, Lipka, "Shaved Beards," 177–82; Cynthia Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, HSM 62 (Winona

It should be noted that this ensemble of masculine characteristics is a scholarly construct. There is no ancient text that states that every man should completely possess these traits.²⁰ However, from them emerges a general whole of hegemonic masculinity that can always be contested. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is vulnerable and unstable.²¹ As Ahab occupies the position of Israelite king who in the ancient Near Eastern context should represent hegemonic masculinity,²² these characteristics should be relevant and helpful in the assessment of his actions.

However, in the case of Elijah, the situation is more complex. It has been noted that the prophets in the Hebrew Bible often deviate from the ideals of masculinity, yet this is not always viewed negatively. The act of prophesying in itself demands that the messenger is in some manner affected by the deity who sends the message.²³ The relative weakness and even humiliation of the prophetic figure does not necessarily mean that he or she has failed as an intermediary.²⁴ In other words, Elijah is not neces-

Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 8–10. Self-control has also been discussed by Stephen M. Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 39.

20. See, for instance, Lipka, “Shaved Beards,” 188, who notes that the ability to persuade was not necessarily related to the masculinity of all men but could be seen particularly as a quality of leadership.

21. Rhiannon Graybill, *Are We Not Men? Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5–6. On the other hand, one may see the complete opposite, for instance, Solomon being swayed by his foreign wives, as another failure of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, in a way, the apparent *conversion* of Ahab in 1 Kgs 16:31 (from simply following the “sin of Jeroboam” to becoming a Baalist) at the very beginning of his regnal narrative, due to his foreign wife Jezebel, may already be taken as a failure of (Deuteronomistic) masculine virtues.

22. Nissinen, “Relative Masculinities,” 227. Ilan Peled notes that as royal iconography presented ideal masculine qualities, they became in certain respects role models for men of lower status. See Peled, *Masculinities and Third Gender: The Origins and Nature of Institutionalized Gender Otherness in the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 435 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2016), 45–46.

23. Ross S. Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 249. Kraemer states that prophesying as a phenomenon constructs the prophet as a penetrated figure. This gives the process of intermediation a notable gendered dimension. See also Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 297.

24. Nissinen, “Relative Masculinities,” 227–28. Graybill, *Are We Not Men?*, 14, states directly that “prophecy can be read as a series of failures of masculinity—or,

sarily threatened by a similar loss of masculinity as Ahab, who by default could be more bound by hegemonic ideals.

Additionally, masculinity should not be viewed as a set of traits that concerns only the characters that are biologically male. Hilary Lipka has utilized the concept of female masculinities to show that a female biblical character such as Queen Jezebel may exhibit a combination of feminine and masculine traits. While Jezebel is a character who is positioned in the domestic sphere, she also appears as a persuasive and violent figure. However, the presence of masculine traits in a female character is not necessarily viewed positively. Lipka notes that while biblical women such as Deborah and Rahab whose behavior exhibits masculine traits may be seen as acceptable, in other contexts, such crossing of boundaries may be viewed as dangerous and threatening. Jezebel, as previously noted, is not only a woman but also a foreigner who is contrasted with men such as Elijah and Ahab. According to Lipka, this specific context may be integral to the evaluation of Jezebel's gendered performance.²⁵

Finally, in the examination of biblical masculinities it is important to note that the texts may not necessarily favor behavior that is aligned with the previously illustrated rigid portrayal of hegemonic masculinity associated with powerful royal figures. As submission to God is seen as a preferred course of action in biblical texts, it provides an alternative to the achievement of masculine ideals. This could mean that while straying from hegemonic masculinity may often be viewed negatively, it can be ultimately positive if it leads to faithfulness toward the deity.²⁶ In this sense, the Hebrew Bible gives space even for men who belong to subordinate or marginalized masculinities. The concept of hegemonic masculinity in itself thus appears to be somewhat nuanced.²⁷

alternately, as transformations to the very representation of 'masculinity' as a category." Interestingly, Graybill sees Elijah as a possible exception to this rule.

25. Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 125–28, 145.

26. Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 15.

27. Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities," 237–38. For a discussion of hegemonic masculinity, see also Milena Kirova, "When Real Men Cry: The Symbolism of Weeping in the Torah and the Deuteronomistic History," in Creangă and Smit, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, 35–50, esp. 46–48; and Martti Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities: Musings on Theory and Agenda," in Creangă and Smit, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, 273–75.

9.3. Encounters at Carmel

The first encounter that is examined is the interaction of Elijah and Ahab in 1 Kgs 18. The events described in that chapter can be viewed as a continuation of the previous chapter 17, where Elijah is introduced as a prophet who conveys the message of drought to Ahab. After this initial encounter, Yahweh commands Elijah to go into hiding. While chapter 17 does not explicate the potential threat that the prophet is instructed to evade, 1 Kgs 18 is clearer about the danger. The prophets of Yahweh are being persecuted by Jezebel who advocates the worship of Baal (18:4). The narration thus gives the queen noteworthy and violent agency, which helps to establish her early on as a potentially transgressive figure.²⁸ Elijah is commanded by Yahweh to meet the king, which would, according to God, result in rain and the end of the famine (18:1).

However, Elijah does not first meet Ahab but his servant Obadiah. In the encounter, Obadiah clearly demonstrates his subservient position by falling on his face and calling Elijah his Lord. The position of Elijah is further emphasized by the subsequent interaction between these two characters: Obadiah is afraid and is first unwilling to tell Ahab about Elijah. However, Elijah is remarkably persuasive, and eventually Obadiah does as commanded. In other words, in this encounter Elijah has demonstrated some of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity that are related to the position of leadership. Furthermore, Elijah is proven to be honorable as he does not deceive Obadiah but keeps his promise at the cost of potentially putting his own life at risk. The passage 1 Kgs 18:7–15 thus establishes Elijah as a persuasive and honorable male who retains his self-control even in difficult situations.

It is also worth noting that Obadiah's response illustrates the potential danger of the situation and adds to the characterization of Ahab and Jezebel. In particular, 1 Kgs 18:9 is explicit about the fact that Ahab is capable of violence, which scares his servant. In this sense, the king possesses traits of violence and agency that are in line with biblical hegemonic masculinity suitable for a royal figure.²⁹ The king clearly has perceived power over the life and fate of his servant.

28. Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 143.

29. It is notable, however, that the later reception of the text appears to occasionally argue that Obadiah may have also been afraid of Jezebel. Manuscript 4Q382 from Qumran contains a curious, partly reconstructed line "and Obad]iah feared Jezebel

It is interesting, however, that Obadiah places the blame of persecution of Yahweh's prophets on Jezebel, not on Ahab. On the one hand, the statement of the servant might at least partially absolve Ahab from responsibility over the situation. This suggests that the queen has a strong and direct influence over events. As Obadiah repeats the accusation of the narrator in 18:13, Jezebel is clearly being marked as a dangerous figure, whose decisions result in violence. Conversely, this sidelines and diminishes the power of Ahab whose influence over the matters of the kingdom seems less absolute.³⁰ While the words of Obadiah may have made Ahab less complicit in the events, they might have implicitly undermined the masculinity of the king.

The next encounter is between the prophet and the king, who accuses Elijah of being "the troubler of Israel."³¹ As would be expected from a true prophet, Elijah shows hardly any subservience toward Ahab, as he redirects the accusation toward the king himself. Similar to Obadiah, Elijah commands Ahab to do as he says, which in this case means arranging the contest between him and the prophets of Baal. Somewhat surprisingly, Ahab complies with Elijah's command without protesting. In fact, he is even more compliant than Obadiah, whom Elijah had more difficulty in persuading.³² This is again interesting from the perspective of the king's expected hegemonic masculinity: Elijah has essentially given a command to a figure who should have utmost authority in the kingdom. This also occurs soon after Obadiah has described Ahab as potentially violent and dangerous. Even more significantly, Ahab remains silent for the rest of the chapter. Ahab's role in chapter 18 appears to be generally that of a

and Ahab the king of Israel." According to Ariel Feldman, the mention of the queen results from the fact that the narrative of 1 Kgs 18 already places the blame of persecution on Jezebel. For the reconstruction, see Ariel Feldman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Rewriting Samuel and Kings: Texts and Commentary*, BZAW 469 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 58–59, 146.

30. As noted by Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 143. Lipka argues that this also demonstrates the presence of the (masculine) trait of leadership in the character of Jezebel.

31. All translations from Hebrew and Greek in the paper are our own.

32. Alan J. Hauser, "Yahweh versus Death—Real Struggle in 1 Kings 17–19," in *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis*, ed. Alan J. Hauser, JSOTSup 85 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 32–33.

bystander, as the initiative for action is taken solely by Elijah—and by Jezebel.³³

Even though Jezebel is not present at Carmel, the prophets of Baal can be viewed as a group that is strongly affiliated with her. In fact, the contest has been viewed as an indirect competition between Elijah and the queen.³⁴ Nonetheless, the contest mainly emphasizes the voice of Elijah. He has not only initiated the contest by persuading the king, but he also constantly gives orders to the prophets of Baal and the other onlookers. Elijah's speech is not only limited to effective commands, as it eventually turns to mocking the prophets (and their deity) in 18:27.

The disrespectful words of Elijah also mark an intensification in the actions of the Baal prophets. While their conduct was initially limited to the calling of the deity and dancing, they appear to resort to more physical and embodied behavior in verse 28. The prophets begin to cut themselves with swords and spears, which creates wounds that pour blood. Their prophesying concretely opens up and penetrates their bodies, which can also be seen as a rupture in the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. As noted earlier, such deviation from masculine ideals is not uncommon in biblical prophecy. Even the prophets of Yahweh, such as Ezekiel or Elisha,³⁵ are subjected to humiliating experiences that would appear to undermine their masculinity.

Nevertheless, the text of 1 Kgs 18 clearly does not view the behavior of the prophets of Baal as appropriate or effective. Instead, the difference between the prophetic bodies appears to be strongly contrasted in favor of Elijah. The prophets of Baal damage and violently open up their own bodies before they are finally destroyed. The body of Elijah on the other hand remains intact, full of life and strength. At the end of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Elijah's characterization is also developed. The text has already revealed that Elijah is composed and com-

33. See also Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 131–32.

34. As noted by Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 131.

35. For a more detailed and recent discussion about the queerness of Elisha's body, see Rhiannon Graybill, "Elisha's Body and the Queer Touch of Prophecy," *BTB* 49 (2019): 32–40. For a more unorthodox, even tragi-comic depiction of prophet Elisha in the likely more original version of the Septuagint, see Timo Tekoniemi, "Enhancing the Depiction of a Prophet: The Repercussions of Textual Criticism for the Study of the Elisha Cycle," *BN* 186 (2020): 75–105.

manding. Now he is shown to be capable of violence as he ultimately kills the prophets of Baal at Kishon.

Furthermore, in the final verse of the chapter, Elijah girds his loins, which is an act of noteworthy masculine implications—the immediate context relates it to running before Ahab’s chariot but it could also imply that Elijah is prepared for further battles.³⁶ If 1 Kgs 18 were the only text under scrutiny, Elijah has almost “too much masculinity, virility, divine spirit, power” as suggested by Rhiannon Graybill.³⁷ He is not merely a messenger of Yahweh and a maker of miracles, but a figure of violent and warlike qualities who could even have superhuman powers as he runs before Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel.

However, Ahab is not entirely passive in this narrative. It may be argued that he performs his cultic duty and renews the covenant with Yahweh by obeying Elijah’s order to eat and drink in 18:41–42.³⁸ While Elijah assumes the more commanding and violent position, Ahab is still able to function as a proper king. His performance as king does not rely on the boasting and violence of Elijah, and it nonetheless seems to be enough. Indeed, rain arrives when Ahab is feasting and acting according to the prophet’s command.

Furthermore, there is a potentially significant textual variant to be noted in this context. In 18:45, before the rain finally starts falling, the Septuagint gives an additional detail missing from MT. According to the Septuagint, Ahab “wept” (καὶ ἔκλαiven) before leaving for Jezreel. While it is possible that this reading is simply due to a scribal mistake (the MT וירכב was incorrectly read as ויבך), the reverse is also plausible, which is that the Septuagint in fact gives an earlier version of the story.³⁹ The first thing to note is that the MT reading is contextually more fitting: in the earlier verse 44, Elijah has, via his servant, commanded Ahab to harness his horses and

36. The girding of loins is discussed by David J. A. Clines, *Job 38–42*, WBC 18B (Nashville: Nelson, 2011), 1096–97.

37. Graybill, *Are We Not Men?*, 46.

38. Kathryn Roberts, “God, Prophet and King: Eating and Drinking on the Mountain in First Kings 18:41,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 640–44.

39. Thus Bernhard Stade, *The Books of Kings* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 156; and James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ed. Henry Snyder, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 312, also take the subject of weeping as Elijah, not Ahab. This interpretation is of course not impossible, though considering the context (and syntax) of the verse, it is much more natural to assume that Ahab is the one weeping.

ride, which Ahab does in 18:45 as the sky begins to darken and the rain subsequently starts falling. This fits the already emerging picture of Elijah as an overly confident and persuasive character, and it also makes his prophetic instruction (Ahab harnessing/riding the horses) come true to the smallest detail.⁴⁰ In the Septuagint, this is not so much the case, however: Ahab suddenly shows his emotions by crying and then simply leaves the scene (וילך). Furthermore, as will be seen below, this is, in fact, not the only occasion where the Septuagint makes Ahab cry/show emotion when MT does not.⁴¹ When one takes into account that Ahab is supposed to be the evilest king of Israel,⁴² such emotional outbursts are somewhat unexpected for such an unrepentant idolater and may, in fact, have been omitted from the textual tradition of MT in order to darken his depiction.⁴³

Indeed, the weeping of Ahab is a detail that could make him more similar to the kings that are generally viewed as *good* rulers. Such extremely virtuous hegemonic figures as Hezekiah, Josiah, and especially David are allowed to weep, and their expressions of emotion can have clear and even

40. The (proto-)Masoretic editor has also elsewhere been interested in enhancing the depiction of both Elijah and his pupil Elisha as great prophets. See Adrian Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher: Die hebräische Vorlage der ursprünglichen Septuaginta als älteste Textform der Königsbücher*, OBO 199 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), and Tekoniemi, “Enhancing the Depiction.”

41. See Philippe Hugo, *Les deux visages d'Élie*, OBO 217 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 281–99. The case of 1 Kings 20(21):27 will be analyzed below. In 20(21):43 Ahab is found weeping in the so-called Antiochean text tradition of the Septuagint (“And the king of Israel went dismayed and weeping, and he went to Samaria”). While in MT the reaction of Ahab is mostly that of anger, in the Septuagint the crying of the king could even be taken as signifying fear and true repentance.

42. The evilness of Ahab is especially enhanced in MT, where no king after him is reported to have been worse. In the Septuagint, however, this is not the case, since in the Lucianic and Old Latin traditions, his son Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:54) and the last king of Israel, Hoshea (2 Kgs 17:2), are reported to have surpassed Ahab's evilness. It is likely that the picture of Ahab has been deliberately made darker; see Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte*, 116–22; and Timo Tekoniemi, *Textual History*, 52–61, for further analysis.

43. See also Philippe Hugo, “Text History as a Research Tool on Literary Development in the Books of Kings: The Case of 1 Kgs 19 MT and LXX” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, 18 November 2007): “Throughout the entire Elijah cycle, MT tends to smooth out the portrait of the king and queen in order to highlight their apostasy.”

positive consequences. David in particular is able to manipulate others with his crying, which suggests that royal crying is in some manner a conscious and possibly premeditated performance.⁴⁴ Hence, it is possible to view the royal weeping of Ahab as an act that is not necessarily outside hegemonic masculinity and could even be seen as a strong signifier of a good king.⁴⁵ Indeed, the weeping that occurs in the relationship between humans and the deity is attested to in both the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature. For instance, the ritualistic weeping of the Babylonian king at the New Year's *akītu* festival was a crucial part of a successful cultic ritual.⁴⁶ Recently, David A. Bosworth has noted that weeping in general is a signal with strong communal significance. While tears may make a person appear relatively helpless, they may also lead to reactions of sympathy. They are a strong signal that may even appease the anger of a wrathful deity.⁴⁷

In 1 Kgs 18:45, the weeping of Ahab is only mentioned briefly, which means that it is difficult to determine how public and performative the act

44. David cries in 1 Sam 20:41, 30:4; 2 Sam 3:32, 13:36, 15:30, and 18:33. See Kirova, "When Real Men Cry," 39–45. See also Kirova, *Performing Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible*, HBM 91 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2020), 154–61. Kirova argues that especially 1 Sam 20:41 presents the weeping of David as a hegemonic performance. It is important to note, however, that in the case of 2 Sam 18:33, where David laments his dead son Absalom, the crying is clearly seen as *negative* and nonhegemonic. Indeed, the act in 18:33 is solely due to David's personal distress and emotion and not intended as a kingly performance—it is anything but, as shown by Joab's reproach in verses 19:5–7. We want to thank Pilvi Sarjala for this observation.

45. Kirova, "When Real Men Cry," 44–45. See also Kirova, *Performing Masculinity*, 160–61. While Kirova notes the weeping of Ahab in the LXX reading of 1 Kgs 21:27, she does not discuss the Greek text of 18:45. From the perspective of literary criticism, it would be quite easy to see how a scribe would want to distance Ahab from the aforementioned pious kings by omitting his crying from the text.

46. See Sam Mirelman, "Lament and Ritual Weeping in the 'Negative Confession' of the Babylonian Akītu Festival," *JANER* 21 (2021): 42–74. The king's weeping after a strike on the cheek from the high priest forms a part of the ritualistic humiliation and reinstatement of the king. Tears induced in this way ensured that the god Bēl was content, and were thus a good omen, while inability to shed tears was seen as a bad omen.

47. David A. Bosworth, *House of Weeping: The Motif of Tears in Akkadian and Hebrew Prayers*, ANEM 24 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 20–24, 26–35. Importantly, Bosworth argues that, while tears can be faked, they cannot be produced without some effort or emotional cause. Hence, the ultimate motivation for tears may not be crucial for their efficacy.

is. Is Ahab crying like a king who wishes to create some effect in his surroundings in a conscious and deliberate manner, or is he emoting like an ordinary human being who is simply overpowered by his emotions? This could be compared to Josiah who suddenly humbled himself and wept after hearing the words from the book of law, as in both cases the king has experienced something profound. However, Josiah creates a *performance* by tearing his clothes, which is lacking from 1 Kgs 18:45. The text does not comment upon the consequences of the weeping, which lends ambiguity to Ahab's behavior. In the reading of the Septuagint, the king, nonetheless, is able to produce a strong, visible, and perhaps even expected signal. The Masoretic Text, on the other hand, curiously leaves the reaction of the king without the contextually appropriate presence of tears.

While Ahab therefore assumes a subservient position, especially in the possibly earlier Septuagint version, it does not seem that the text views him particularly negatively. Quite the contrary, one can see the weeping of the king in the Septuagint as a positive, and arguably even hegemonic, trait. This seems to confirm the suggestion by Haddox that excessive displays of strength or persuasiveness are not always necessary for divine favor.⁴⁸ However, at the same time, the strong, even extreme expressions of masculinity are also viewed positively in the actions of Elijah. While some scholars see irony in the chapter in the light of 1 Kgs 19, there is no explicit criticism of the prophet.⁴⁹

The events at Carmel directly and explicitly involve only male characters. There is no interaction with Jezebel, although she is important for initiating the events. The masculinities of Elijah and Ahab are not developed in isolation, as they reflect off each other, as also the characters of Obadiah and the prophets of Baal. The submissive behavior of Obadiah accentuates certain hegemonic qualities of Elijah and Ahab, and worshippers of Baal provide a counterpart to the powerful and violent behavior of the former. Nonetheless, as the Hebrew Bible does not exclusively espouse characteristics such as aggression or dominance, differences in masculine traits do not always end in violence or judgment.

48. Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 15–16.

49. Tchavdar Hadjiev, "Elijah's Alleged Megalomania: Reading Strategies for Composite Texts, with 1 Kings 19 as an Example," *JSOT* 39 (2015): 433–49, esp. 438. For the argument in favor of irony, see Russell Gregory, "Irony and the Unmasking of Elijah," in *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis*, ed. Alan J. Hauser, *JSOTSup* 85 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 150.

Elijah and Ahab, though significantly different in their gendered characterization, leave the scene as potential allies. The prophet can be violent and powerful, and the king can be seen as meek in comparison, as long as they serve Yahweh. In a certain sense, their different masculinities can coexist.

9.4. Fleeing Prophet, Sidelined King, and Dominant Queen

The second encounter that is interesting from the perspectives of gender and textual criticism can be found at the beginning of 1 Kgs 19. This section directly follows the killing of Baalists at Mount Carmel, as Elijah and Ahab have arrived in Jezreel, and the latter tells Jezebel about the events. After this, Jezebel sends a direct threat to Elijah via a messenger, which states that in retribution for his actions at Carmel, Jezebel will kill him. As recently noted by Lipka, this threat can be connected to the notion of female masculinities.⁵⁰ Whereas the previous chapter introduced the violence of Jezebel concerning the prophets of Yahweh, now the threat of physical danger might also affect Elijah himself. It is indeed remarkable that the first time the text gives voice to Jezebel in 19:3, it makes a direct reference to violence. This can be viewed as a notable trait of hegemonic and royal masculinity.

From a text-critical point of view, the threat made by Jezebel in 19:2 is highly interesting for gender studies, since the Septuagint gives a slightly longer version of the narrative. Before her oath, Jezebel openly challenges Elijah, as if they were equal: “*If you are Elijah and I am Jezebel, thus may the God*⁵¹ *do to me and even more.*” As Bernhard Stade remarks about this Septuagint plus, “it is difficult to understand how it could have been omitted in MT,”⁵² at least by mistake. Indeed, it is again very much a possibility that a (proto-)MT editor, in fact, deliberately omitted this notion, since it “lends Jezebel the pretension of being the equal of, or even more

50. Lipka, “Queen Jezebel’s Masculinity,” 143–44.

51. The Septuagint gives the word as singular ὁ θεός, as is also the case with the two verbs in Jezebel’s speech (given as plurals יַעֲשֶׂה and יִזְכָּר in MT). The singular understanding is likely the earlier version of the text, as it makes Jezebel swear by Yahweh, not her native gods. This would have likely been seen as ideologically problematic by (proto-)MT editors and in need of revision.

52. Stade, *Kings*, 156.

powerful than, Elijah.”⁵³ Another hint in favor of this reading is the Masoretic vocalization of the verse-beginning verb **וַיֵּרָא** in 19:3, now translated as “and he saw.” The Septuagint, however, understands these same root consonants as “and Elijah was afraid” (*καὶ ἐφοβήθη Ἡλίου, ἡλίου**), which is likely the more ancient understanding of the text.⁵⁴ Thus, in MT Elijah simply observes and evaluates the dire situation and acts accordingly,⁵⁵ while in the Septuagint his flight from Samaria could be understood as a blind panic, initiated by the threat posed by Jezebel.

Elijah’s reaction is therefore highly surprising in the light of his previous actions—so surprising, in fact, that it is likely that chapters 18 and 19 originally derive from different writers altogether.⁵⁶ Elijah does not resort to violence or persuasion but flees. Finally, he arrives in the wilderness as a defeated person and ultimately begs Yahweh for his death. While Elijah eventually regains his composure, this reaction is perplexing, since he displays none of the masculine qualities of the previous chapter.⁵⁷ Elijah’s masculin-

53. Hugo, “Text History,” 10. Hugo further stresses: “In this context, Elijah and Jezebel are the last survivors of their respective clans.... In this way, as far as the LXX is concerned, the conflict is between the two protagonists rather than between Ahab and Elijah. From the MT side, it is otherwise. In these two verses alone, the confrontation is less head-on: there is not a reply to the direct challenge and the terror is smoothed out.”

54. Hugo, “Text History,” 9; Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament*, OBO 36 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 234. Thus also most commentators; see, for instance, Montgomery, *Kings*, 317; and Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 450: “The imperious sound of these words—You may be Elijah, but I am Jezebel—is in character for this self-confident queen.” Interestingly enough, even some medieval Masoretic manuscripts (Kennicott 110 and 614) support the reading of the Septuagint.

55. Frances Flannery, “‘Go Back by the Way You Came’: An Internal Textual Critique of Elijah’s Violence in 1 Kings 18–19,” in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Rithel Ames, SymS 42 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 171.

56. Cogan, *1 Kings*, 456: “The reader is not prepared for the charge brought by the prophet against the Israelites that they, not Ahab (cf. 18:18), had abandoned the covenant, especially after their reported acknowledgement of YHWH as the one and only God on Mount Carmel (18:39). Based on this accusation alone ... as seen by most critiques, 1 Kgs 19 was originally an independent narrative, now editorially joined to 1 Kgs 17–18.”

57. However, it is unclear whether this turn of events negatively affects Elijah’s

ity seems to be compromised, although the larger narrative appears to play down the potential consequences and significance of this event.

The text also affects the portrayal of Ahab and Jezebel. At the end of chapter 18, Ahab could almost be viewed as a redeemed king and an ally of Elijah. In Jezreel, he is nonetheless unable to stay loyal to the prophet or Yahweh and to convince his wife of the power of Yahweh. As Ahab perceives Elijah negatively in 1 Kgs 21(20):20, after taking possession of Naboth's vineyard, one might even conclude that Jezebel has convinced Ahab to uphold her position. For instance, Amy Kalmanofsky has argued that in this section Jezebel demonstrates that she has transgressed certain boundaries of her role as the king's wife. She does not support Ahab but decides what his eventual attitudes and loyalties will be. Jezebel's actions do not seem to be performed under a pretense of kingly authority, as the threat especially in the Septuagint emphasizes her independent agency. Ahab's position is thus rendered practically irrelevant, and this reveals a significant inability to adhere to hegemonic masculinity.⁵⁸ Whereas Ahab's tendency to subordinate himself to Elijah and God could be viewed as ultimately positive traits, here this relative weakness imperils the future of the entire kingdom.

At the same time, Jezebel's threat to Elijah is, especially in the light of the Septuagint, highly personal and seems to put them directly at odds. It could be argued that Jezebel has not only usurped Ahab's position as a ruler but has also been revealed to have attributes that are not unlike Eli-

disposition with Yahweh. When Elijah flees, he embarks on a journey that culminates in a theophany on Mount Horeb. As Elijah is ordered to anoint not only Hazael and Jehu but also his successor Elisha, there could be an implication that the prophet's actions have led to his eventual decommissioning; see Cogan, *1 Kings*, 457. Nevertheless, the text does not offer an explicit rebuke of Elijah, and in the larger narrative context the prophet is allowed to convey messages to both Ahab and Ahaziah. Hadjiev, "Elijah's Alleged Megalomania," 439, states that "close attention to the details of Elijah's portrayal, especially in ch. 19, creates the impression of a disobedient and selfish prophet, but at the same time the larger literary context undermines and invalidates this impression because it suggests that the narrator's overall estimation of Elijah's person and activities is positive."

58. See Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 100, who states that "Jezebel, I argue does wield her own power, which makes her a unique figure. She does not seduce her king but influences and subverts him." At the same time, however, Jezebel is still confined to her private sphere. She does not go out to the open to personally meet and challenge Elijah. See Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 136.

jah's excessive persuasiveness and power.⁵⁹ Both are responsible not only for the changes in Ahab's loyalties, but also for the massacres of the prophets of the deities they oppose.⁶⁰ Hence, Jezebel demonstrates that certain traits of hegemonic masculinity can be possessed by a foreign woman.⁶¹ Kalmanofsky notes that these characterizations seem to contain ideas that endorse the binary division of gender.⁶² It is clearly catastrophic in this context when a (foreign) woman assumes significant power, and her husband becomes submissive and passive in comparison. This transgression can even threaten the previously unchallenged strength and resolve of Elijah, who has now encountered the first truly demoralizing obstacle on his journey.

9.5. The Case of Naboth's Vineyard

The third and final chapter that deals with the interactions of these characters is 1 Kgs 21(20). Ahab is interested in gaining possession of the vineyard of Naboth. The king tries to bargain with Naboth, but his offers are rebuked as the latter claims that such a deal would be against the will of Yahweh.⁶³ The persuasive abilities of the king are again rather weak here, which could be viewed as a failure to behave in accordance with the expectations of hegemonic and royal masculinity. However, one could also see this as the king being initially both unwilling to act against Yahweh and unwilling to abuse his powers, which could be related to the trait of hon-

59. One could even argue that Jezebel in fact *wins* the duel between herself and Elijah, as she is only finally killed by Jehu (who was crowned by Elisha, pupil of Elijah) in 2 Kgs 9:30–37.

60. Phyllis Trible, "Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers," *JBL* 114 (1995): 8–9.

61. Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 142–44.

62. As Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 96, remarks, "Although Jezebel and the eunuchs may challenge the notion of a gender binary inherent to human experience, their story reveals the degree to which the Bible supports a binary notion of gender that distinguishes between male and female behaviors, and that works to uphold male privilege."

63. Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 101, observes that the encounter between Ahab and Naboth could parallel the interaction between David and Uriah the Hittite. In both cases, a king desires something that is not his. However, while David is able to get what he wants by himself, Ahab is unable—or unwilling—to perform such a feat. In a way, evil Ahab might thus perform in a *more* pious manner than David.

orability. In this light, Ahab's actions could initially even be interpreted as exemplary for a king.

Ahab, however, is unable to put the matter to rest. He returns to his palace sullen and angry, refuses to eat, and passively lies on his bed. This provokes the attention of Jezebel, who questions Ahab about the reason for his behavior. After Ahab reveals his failed attempt to gain possession of the vineyard, Jezebel shows that she may indeed be more active than her husband. In fact, Jezebel's initial response "Do you now rule Israel?" is clearly to be understood as a sarcastic rhetorical question, which is possibly a way of exercising informal power.⁶⁴ Importantly, the question targets the royal position of Ahab.

What Jezebel does afterward may be fairly revealing from the perspective of gender. There is a certain ambiguity to her actions, as her statement "Arise, eat food, and be joyful in your heart; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite," could be understood as either commanding or merely encouraging. In a certain sense, she may be overstepping her powers, but she still recognizes that it is the authority of the king that matters. This is evident when Jezebel gives the order to kill Naboth. The letters are not signed in her own name, but rather they bear the seal of Ahab. This, in fact, differentiates Jezebel from figures such as Athaliah who actually has the formal authority to rule.⁶⁵

While the section seems to reverse the roles of the king and his wife, not everything about the narrative and characterization is necessarily transgressive. Even though Jezebel's actions are evil, they are aimed at supporting her husband, even if without his acceptance. In fact, Jezebel is shown to be loyal to her husband, a trait that is in accordance with the ideal of her gender and her position as queen. It is not so clear whether

64. Patrick T. Cronauer, *The Stories about Naboth the Jezreelite: A Source, Composition and Redaction Investigation of 1 Kings 21 and Passages in 2 Kings*, LHBOTS 424 (New York: T&T Clark 2005), 123. For a discussion about the women of the Hebrew Bible and informal power, see also Gale A. Yee, *Poor, Banished Children*, 48–52. Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 133 notes that Ahab is remarkably open to sharing his worries with the queen.

65. However, Cronauer, *Stories about Naboth*, 159, notes that while she has been acting under the guise of Ahab, the king is not informed of her actions. Paynter, "Ahab—Heedless Father," 459, argues that Jezebel's status is at that point an "open secret." Even if the letters have Ahab's seal, the people know that the king would not have been able to author them. While this, without a doubt, undercuts Ahab's masculinity, it might also render him less responsible for the evils that are occurring in Israel.

Jezebel assumes masculine traits here. Rather, she is shown to use informal means to exploit the situation in order to deliver something that her husband desires.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, even if one interprets the relationship of the king and queen as a harmonious one, the narrative appears to highlight their respective passivity and activity. Ahab is characterized as a figure who requires the advice of his wife, which, according to some definitions of biblical masculinity, could be viewed as a deviation from the hegemonic ideal.⁶⁷

The Masoretic Text does not suggest that Ahab is angry or disturbed by the events arranged by his wife. On the contrary, in the MT Ahab calmly departs for Naboth's vineyard to claim his new property after hearing about the original owner's fate (21[20]:16). However, the situation is again very different in the Septuagint, according to which "he rent his clothes and put on sackcloth. And it happened after this that he rose and Ahab went down to Naboth's vineyard" (21[20]:16). Ahab thus shows remarkable remorse for the unjustly murdered Naboth. It seems likely that a (proto-)MT reviser has here omitted the idea that Ahab has behaved in accordance with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, in order to further undermine Ahab's authority as a king. At the same time, the omission of this behavior changes the characterization of Ahab so that he appears cruel and heartless, as he simply goes to take possession of the vineyard after hearing about Jezebel's deed.⁶⁸ In the Septuagint, Ahab

66. Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 110, claims that Jezebel as a character is "gender transgressive." Nevertheless, it is less certain if the narrative is entirely consistent in its portrayal of the transgressive activity. The manner in which Jezebel wields power is not necessarily against her gendered position but a necessity that arises from her lack of formal authority. In fact, the most transgressive act by Jezebel could be at the beginning of 1 Kgs 19, where her actions are less clandestine. However, Zlotnick, "From Jezebel to Esther," 479, may overstate the case of the harmonious coexistence of Ahab and Jezebel as she remarks: "Within this familial context Jezebel emerges as the king's solicitous spouse rather than as a bearer of idolatry." Lipka, "Queen Jezebel's Masculinity," 133–34, observes that one can either see the relationship as a harmonious or more of a tumultuous marriage.

67. As in the definitions of masculinity by Clines, "David the Man," 216–17, and Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 4.

68. Thus Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte*, 97–98. The (proto-)MT editors seem to have had a tendency to darken the depiction of Ahab, as argued above. Many commentators take the opposite position here, namely, that the Septuagint plus has been inserted here from 21(20):27; see Montgomery, *Kings*, 334, and Stade, *Kings*, 165.

is still truly surprised—and even frightened—by the outcome, and he accordingly shows emotion.

Afterward, Elijah is ordered by Yahweh to pronounce judgment against Ahab and they meet at Naboth's vineyard. The king shows antagonism toward the prophet, but, as in 1 Kgs 18, does not act against him. Elijah is allowed to judge Ahab without any resistance. Noteworthy in the judgment that declares death to both Ahab and Jezebel is that it first claims that Ahab has sold himself to evil. This is also repeated in verse 25, making it explicit that the actions were influenced by Jezebel. In other words, the sins of Ahab are related to the fact that he has been unable to resist the influence of Jezebel. Consequently, his inability to adhere to hegemonic masculinity is viewed very negatively.

After hearing Elijah's judgment, Ahab grieves, which, as noted before, does not necessarily imply a loss of self-control but a willingness to appeal to God. Indeed, according to the Septuagint, "Ahab was greatly distressed before the Lord, and he went weeping (20[21]:27)," which shows that Ahab's actions should be read as an almost pious acknowledgment of God's/Elijah's power. The Masoretic Text is curious in that it does not include the notion of weeping, even though the other performative aspects of the act, such as fasting and humbling himself, are present. Again, it is likely that the weeping of Ahab has been later omitted from the text for this very reason, that is, to remove from the text any possibility of Ahab appearing as a pious or good king. Additionally, the grieving has positive consequences for Ahab, which indicates that the performance of grief has indeed been successful.⁶⁹ While the king is not completely absolved, the judgment of Yahweh is postponed to a later time.

9.6. Conclusions

When the behavior and interactions of Elijah, Jezebel, and Ahab are examined, a complex picture emerges. These characters sometimes act according to their gender roles and status, and sometimes either fail or exceed gen-

69. Kirova, "When Real Men Cry," 44–45. As noted above, here, too, Ahab not being able to weep in MT distances him from the traits of kings that are deemed good in the context of the books of Kings. Indeed, in the case of the Babylonian king at the *akitu* festival (see footnote 46), the ability to weep is the most important aspect of the god Bēl staying benevolent, and a similar dynamic could be seen at play in the Septuagint version of the story.

dered expectations. Elijah is almost exaggeratedly violent, confident, and persuasive in chapter 18, but his behavior changes entirely in chapter 19, where he is depicted as a lone, persecuted prophet. Ahab is fairly consistently shown to be weak, but this weakness is not always viewed as a clearly negative trait as it can also lead him to display obedience toward Yahweh and Elijah. Jezebel is consistently evil from the perspective of Yahweh and Elijah, but at certain points she possesses even frightening qualities (1 Kgs 19), while at other times she can be viewed as loyal to Ahab, recognizing the limits of her formal authority (1 Kgs 21). There is a question over whether this characterization should be judged as entirely consistent. Indeed, as texts such as 1 Kgs 18 and 19 likely originate from different authors, divergent portrayals of these characters are not necessarily surprising. However, this aspect of the texts presents a definitive challenge for gender-critical readings that often focus on the final form of the narrative. Different writers at different times have had varied views and emphases on gender and gendered expectations. This has to be taken into account more in the research.

Similarly, some aspects of Ahab's weakness and Jezebel's deeds differ somewhat between the different textual traditions. In the Septuagint, which likely retains the older version of the story, Ahab is shown weeping multiple times, and he is generally a more ambivalent character, capable of more nuanced emotions than his MT counterpart. On the other hand, Jezebel is shown in the Septuagint as an even more confident character than in MT. As the Jezebel of the Septuagint more clearly transgresses the boundaries of an ideal queen and clearly acts against the wishes of Ahab, she also presents a greater threat to the masculinity of Ahab and Elijah. Conversely, the Ahab of the Greek text emerges as an even remorseful figure whose masculinity is emphatically compromised by Jezebel, who in comparison is more powerful and malevolent. Indeed, as far as masculinity is concerned, the characterizations of Ahab in different texts may present something of a paradox that may point to a need to focus on potentially contradictory elements of biblical masculinity. Thus, the portrayals provide a case for understanding the gendered interactions and characterizations as ambiguous features of the texts, which defy sometimes overly rigidly defined notions such as hegemony or subordination.

The differences between textual traditions show gradual changes in the way gender and gender roles were understood in the communities using and writing biblical texts in the last centuries BCE. Textual criticism

therefore presents important and potentially revolutionary possibilities for studying the gender aspects of biblical text(s) and ancient communities.

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10

Cognitive Science Meets Septuagint Studies: Seeking Clarity and Complexity to the Case of Anthropomorphism

Jutta Jokiranta, Ville Mäkipelto, and Miika Tucker

The Greek philosopher Xenophanes was the first to use the term anthropomorphism when describing the striking similarity between religious believers and their gods, with Greek gods having fair skin and blue eyes and African gods having dark skin and brown eyes.

—Adam Waytz, Nicholas Epley, and John T. Cacioppo,
“Social Cognition Unbound”

10.1. Introduction

Does the God of the Hebrew Bible have the same kind of body and mind as the God of the Greek Septuagint? Does God have a body at all? Whereas no scholar denies that the biblical (Hebrew or Greek) God sometimes walks, dwells, smells, thinks, and talks, there is much controversy about how this tendency to depict God in human terms should be understood, how it changes over time, or how it varies between different biblical books, authors, and translators. Is anthropomorphism in sacred texts something embarrassing that is suppressed but still unavoidable? Or is it an essential way of speaking of God at all times in order to communicate what God does and is?

In this chapter, we explore recent work in cognitive science in order to understand the wider phenomenon of anthropomorphism. The number of studies on anthropomorphism is rapidly growing. Scholars from various fields wish to explain why and how people perceive human features in ambiguous stimuli or ascribe human features to many types of nonhuman

entities, whether they be artifacts, technology, nature, markets, or inanimate objects, and what consequences this tendency has.¹ A great amount of research focuses on issues other than religion, for example, on branding and consumer behavior, the human-nature relationship, or the human-technological interface.² A philosophical debate concerns the question whether causation and the production of scientific knowledge can be understood at all without the human experience of agency and anthropomorphism.³

Here, we wish to benefit from cognitive research in order to understand the Septuagint (LXX) translators better. Some Septuagint scholars have seen evidence of “antianthropomorphism” in the Septuagint, which is the avoidance of anthropomorphic depictions of God. Naturally, this phenomenon is pertinent to the Hebrew Bible and its variation in conceptualizing God,⁴ but we must leave that part aside here. Suffice it to say that the anthropomorphic representation of God is understood to be very strong in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Pentateuch, and the bodily representation of God has especially puzzled scholars.⁵ Recently,

1. For literature, see Andrew Shtulman and Marjaana Lindeman, “Attributes of God: Conceptual Foundations of a Foundational Belief,” *Cognitive Science* 40 (2016): 635–70.

2. For example, Katerina Karanika and Margaret K. Hogg, “Self-Object Relationships in Consumers’ Spontaneous Metaphors of Anthropomorphism, Zoomorphism, and Dehumanization,” *Journal of Business Research* 109 (2020): 15–25; Denis Vidal, “Anthropomorphism or Sub-anthropomorphism? An Anthropological Approach to Gods and Robots,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (2007): 917–33; Peter A. M. Ruijten et al., “Perceived Human-Likeness of Social Robots: Testing the Rasch Model as a Method for Measuring Anthropomorphism,” *International Journal of Social Robotics* 11 (2019): 477–94; Adam Waytz, John T. Cacioppo, and Nicholas Epley, “Who Sees Human? The Stability and Importance of Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5 (2010): 219–32.

3. Marco Buzzoni, “The Agency Theory of Causality, Anthropomorphism, and Simultaneity,” *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 28 (2014): 375–95.

4. For recent contributions on the Hebrew Bible from cognitive perspectives, see Brett E. Maiden, *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion: New Perspectives on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Daniel O. McClellan, *YHWH’S Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach*, ANEM 29 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022).

5. For the research history on the Pentateuch and the evolutionary schemes that scholars have presented of primitive representations of God and of a more abstract and sophisticated God, see Anne K. Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch*, Siphut 12 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 1–22.

Mark Smith has proposed a theory of three different divine bodies in the Hebrew Bible (in light of other ancient Near Eastern evidence) according to which the divine body varies in terms of size, location, and (extraordinary) properties.⁶ The first is the human body, which is attested mainly in Genesis, where God appears in regular human size and appearance when communicating with the patriarchs.⁷ Second, the liturgical body is attested in the Exodus-Sinai and Isaiah theophanies in which the divine body appears larger than and different from the human body but is experienced on earth. Third, the cosmic body is attested in prophetic texts in which the divine body is beyond the firmament, in the heavens, and is something not quite conceivable. Two of these bodies, the human and the liturgical, are very old in Smith's view (dating from the Bronze Age), whereas the third is a more recent development from the postexilic/Persian period.

If such a development is to be believed, then the very humanlike God in the Hebrew Bible belongs to a distant past, but the supersized and not quite comprehensible divine body remains attractive. Within the Hebrew Bible, the patriarchs were more likely to meet a human God, Moses was more likely to meet a superhuman God, and the prophets were more likely to meet the heavenly superhuman God. It is worth asking if this pattern remains the same in the Septuagint and whether other variables might also be relevant. The matter is not only about how God is depicted but how the divinity interacts with humans.

With the help of cognitive science, we wish to continue the work of others in order to be more articulate and clearer about which aspects of the human likeness are relevant in each case at hand (*specifying* anthropomorphism), but we also question if the cases that have been studied are relevant in terms of anthropomorphism, that is, whether the features are uniquely human or not (*dismantling* anthropomorphism). We question the common assumption that the anthropomorphic or less anthropomorphic

6. Mark S. Smith, "The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 134 (2015): 471–88; Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

7. Esther J. Hamori argues that this human God should not be thought of as more primitive but that these authors also had a theological reason for presenting God's appearance in this (concrete) way. In the collection of different theophanies in the Hebrew Bible, a concrete theophany underlines the communicative nature of the Divine. See Esther J. Hamori, *When Gods Were Men: The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature*, BZAW 384 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

depictions of God attested in biblical texts give immediate access to how the authors *thought* of God and that there is a theological change from more anthropomorphic conceptions to less anthropomorphic conceptions. Biblical authors had similar cognitive operations as present-day people do, and their thinking can be seen to be as varied but also as constrained as ours.

In the following, we first introduce some research history in Septuagint studies, then we present research from cognitive science, and finally we discuss and relate our findings to examples of textual cases in the Septuagint.

10.2. The Problem of Anthropomorphisms in Septuagint Studies

Anthropomorphic or nonanthropomorphic depictions of the divine have been interpreted as revealing the translation profiles or theological views of the Septuagint translators. Some translators have been characterized as following an antianthropomorphic tendency, meaning that these translators avoid attributing human traits to the divine when the Hebrew source text contains such depictions. However, as a brief review of research history will demonstrate, the issue is methodologically more problematic than is often assumed.

While this phenomenon has been noted by some early scholars, the first influential systematic study arguing for the existence of an antianthropomorphic tendency was published by Charles T. Fritsch in 1943 (reprinted in 2015).⁸ Fritsch defines the phenomenon thus: “This tendency in the Greek translations to avoid representations or conceptions of God under human form or with human attributions and emotions may well be called anti-anthropomorphic; and the actual examples themselves, anti-anthropomorphisms.”⁹ Fritsch further defines two types of this phenomenon: (1) antianthropomorphisms in the technical or narrow sense of the word, where the translators avoid giving God human form as well as emotions or passions (“anthropopathies”); and (2) antianthropomorphisms in a more vague sense, where the translator removes any thought or action from God that may be perceived as lowering his dignity. In his

8. Charles Theodore Fritsch, *The Anti-anthropomorphism in the Greek Pentateuch* (repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Before this, the phenomenon was noted by, e.g., Zacharias Frankel, *Vorstudien zu der Septuaginta* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1841), 174–79, who connected it with theological interpretation in early Jewish traditions (e.g., Targum Onkelos).

9. Fritsch, *Anti-anthropomorphism*, 3.

study, Fritsch collects all the examples of both types of antianthropomorphisms that he finds in the Greek Pentateuch.

Fritsch arrives at the general conclusion that there is, in fact, an active tendency in the Greek Pentateuch to avoid anthropomorphic expressions of God. However, this tendency is far from consistent. Exodus contains the most examples of this tendency, while Genesis and Leviticus do not contain many cases. Poetic passages contain more examples, while prose contains less cases. Moreover, even in passages in which the Septuagint almost consistently avoids anthropomorphic depictions of God, it still usually preserves at least one instance of the literal rendering. Fritsch concludes that the translators did not generally seek to rewrite the Pentateuch, but in some instances “their theology is brought out” as seen in their antianthropomorphic renderings.¹⁰ As a general conclusion of the phenomenon, he states that there appear to be two streams of antianthropomorphic development in Jewish history: (1) the antianthropomorphic passages in the Hebrew Bible itself (e.g., Exod 20:4–6; Num 23:19; Deut 4:15) that were later developed further in the rabbinical period; and (2) the antianthropomorphic tendencies in the Septuagint and later Greek traditions (e.g., Philo) that resulted from contact with Greek thought and idiom. The sporadic antianthropomorphisms in the Septuagint, according to Fritsch, stand at the starting point of this development.¹¹

Fritsch’s study was received by many scholars as a demonstration of the existence of this phenomenon.¹² However, Harry M. Orlinsky strongly disagreed with Fritsch in the interpretation of the collected cases. In Orlinsky’s view, Fritsch had assumed from the outset that there was an antianthropomorphic tendency in the Pentateuch and had collected the evidence as guided by this assumption. Orlinsky argued that these cases “are the result of nothing more tendentious than mere stylism, with theology and philosophy playing no direct role whatever in the matter.”¹³ To support his argument, Orlinsky collects several cases in the Septuagint where the body parts, thoughts, and emotions of God are translated

10. Fritsch, *Anti-anthropomorphism*, 62.

11. Fritsch, *Anti-anthropomorphism*, 65.

12. For example, Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen, *Die Textformen der Septuaginta-Übersetzung des Richterbuches*, AASF B 72.1 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1951), 83–84, accepted the conclusions of Fritsch’s study.

13. Harry M. Orlinsky, “The Treatment of Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathisms in the LXX of Isaiah,” *HUCA* 27 (1956): 194.

literally.¹⁴ Orlinsky describes Fritsch's analysis of the phenomenon as "anti-anthropomorphic fiction."

The opposing arguments put forth by Fritsch and Orlinsky set off the debate about the existence of antianthropomorphic tendencies in the Greek translations. The matter has since then been taken up sporadically in various studies, usually when dealing with particular books. The book of Job is a well-known example of a Septuagint translator who takes creative freedoms. Donald Gard argued that one of the tendencies of the translator of Job was to avoid anthropomorphisms, while Orlinsky disagreed.¹⁵ Also, abstract translation equivalents of God's body parts have been explained by some as examples of antianthropomorphic thinking. For example, in Joshua, the translator often translates the expression "the mouth of the Lord" (פִּי יְהוָה) by using the word "command" (πρόσταγμα) instead of "mouth" (e.g., Josh 9:14; 15:13; 17:4; 19:50; 21:33; 22:9). Moreover, in Josh 4:24, the "hand of the Lord" (יַד יְהוָה) becomes "the power of the Lord" (δύναμις τοῦ κυρίου). These have been argued to represent the reluctance of the translator to attribute human body parts to God.¹⁶ However, since the translator of Joshua also employs literal translations of body parts (e.g., χεὶρὸς Κυρίου "the hand of the Lord," Josh 22:31) and is known for varying the Greek translation equivalents of recurring Hebrew expressions,¹⁷ it remains a matter of debate whether these choices actually result from an antianthropomorphic motive or whether they are stylistic and linguistic choices (see further below).

Staffan Olofsson contributed to this discussion by analyzing the translations of anthropomorphisms and metaphorical divine names and epithets in LXX Psalms.¹⁸ Olofsson takes a rather critical position toward the assumed theological exegesis in the translations. He identifies divine titles

14. Orlinsky, "Treatment of Anthropomorphism," 195–200.

15. Donald Gard, *The Exegetical Method of the Greek Translator of the Book of Job*, SBLMS 8 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1952), 32–36; Orlinsky "Treatment of Anthropomorphism," 157.

16. Johannes Hollenberg, *Der Charakter der alexandrinischen Übersetzung des Buches Josua und ihr textkritischer Werth* (Moers, Germany: Eckner, 1876), 9; Michaël N. van der Meer, "Joshua," in *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2015), 97.

17. Ville Mäkipelto, *Uncovering Ancient Editing: Documented Evidence of Changes in Joshua 24 and Related Texts*, BZAW 513 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 28.

18. Staffan Olofsson, *God Is My Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint*, ConBOT 31 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990).

whose literal translations are almost systematically avoided by the translators, most notably צור “rock.” However, Olofsson concludes that “the choice of equivalents is rarely based on conscious theological exegesis, being rather a reflection of the translators’ linguistic conception of the expression in question.”¹⁹ The anthropomorphic terms, according to Olofsson, very seldom have a literal meaning, but already the Hebrew text employs them in a metaphorical and poetical way. This trait is then further developed in the Septuagint. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Natalio Fernández Marcos argued for a middle ground. He pointed out that the debate “has to be resolved in a non-uniform way due to the non-uniform treatment of the text, depending on the book and in connection with the translation technique of each.”²⁰ Fernández Marcos rightly points out that it is not possible to make a global judgment on the issue, but every book has to be dealt with separately. Some may be more strongly antianthropomorphic than others.

One of the latest contributions is by Mikhail Seleznev, who aimed to make the case for a “more objective” study by statistically analyzing the translations of the Hebrew semipreposition בעני “in the eyes of, in view of” in the assumed Old Greek of the books of Reigns (= Samuel-Kings).²¹ This semipreposition has been translated in the Septuagint both very literally (ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς “in the eyes of”) and by using a standard Greek preposition (ἐναντίον, ἐνώπιον, or κατενώπιον).²² Seleznev categorized the equivalents in Reigns based on whether they were literal/nonliteral and whether they referred to God or humans. Based on this categorization, he suggested that there are statistically significant differences in the translation equivalents depending on whether the text refers to God or to a human being.²³

19. Olofsson, *God Is My Rock*, 149.

20. Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 312.

21. Mikhail G. Seleznev, “Anti-anthropomorphisms in the Septuagint: Statistical Testing of a Hypothesis,” in *Die Septuaginta: Geschichte, Wirkung, Relevanz*, ed. Martin Meiser, Michaela Geiger, Siegfried Kreuzer, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 405 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 416–30.

22. These translation equivalents are used in different ways in different books: on the one hand, some books nearly always translate it nonliterally (e.g., the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Isaiah) and, on the other hand, some books are nearly always literal (e.g., the kaige sections of Reigns, Ruth).

23. In his analysis, Seleznev assumed that Codex Vaticanus and related manuscripts represent the most likely Old Greek translation in the nonkaige sections. In the kaige sections, he made the analysis based on the Antiochene tradition, which

Thus, the analysis is in line with an earlier conclusion by James Shenkel about Kings, which is that the Old Greek favored the nonliteral ἐνώπιον when referring to the divine and the literal ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς when referring to humans.²⁴ Seleznev concludes that “the semantic factor (namely, whether the Hebrew בעני refers to God’s eyes or man’s eyes) might have tipped the balance between different translation strategies.”²⁵ However, in the end, his analysis does not demonstrate this motivation. The statistical analysis simply shows that the differences in the translation equivalents, when categorized by the referent of the preposition, are *not due to chance*. What exactly the *motivation* behind this translation choice was, remains an open question. This is a matter of qualitative interpretation of the data, and statistics per se do not improve the objectivity of the argument.

The matter is further complicated by the text-critical consensus that the variation in the Septuagint is often caused by a different Hebrew source text rather than by the work of the translators.²⁶ Consider Exod 4:24 where the Masoretic Text (MT) states that YHWH approached the camp of Moses to meet (פגש) and kill him. The reading in the Septuagint avoids the anthropomorphic notion of YHWH himself meeting Moses in the camp by stating that it was the “angel of the Lord” (ἄγγελος κυρίου) who sought to confront Moses. But who made this change? Here it would be hasty to conclude that the Greek translator was uneasy with the depiction in the Masoretic Text and made the change during the translation

he assumes to preserve the most likely Old Greek text. One should note that this is a simplistic solution and the nature of these witnesses and on how to reconstruct the Old Greek text of Reigns is currently being debated. See Ville Mäkipelto, “The Septuagint and the Major Recensions,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Septuagint Research*, ed. William A. Ross and W. Edward Glenny (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 168–172, for a summary of the debate.

24. James Donald Shenkel, *Chronology and Textual Development in the Greek Text of Kings*, HSM 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 13–17. Subsequently, the literal kaige revision changed the ἐνώπιον renderings back to their literal counterparts.

25. Seleznev, “Anti-anthropomorphisms,” 421.

26. Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015). Recent work in this regard has been done by, for example, Anneli Aejmelaeus, “What Happened to the Text in Jer 25:1–7?,” *TC 22* (2017): 1–10, <http://jbtcl.org/v22/TC-2017-Aejmelaeus.pdf>; Kristin De Troyer, *The Ultimate and the Penultimate Text of the Book of Joshua*, CBET 100 (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), and Mäkipelto, *Uncovering Ancient Editing*.

process. It is also entirely possible that the Hebrew source text of LXX Exodus already read מלאך יהוה “messenger of YHWH,” which the translator translated literally.²⁷ If this is the case, the change should not be considered a case of avoiding anthropomorphisms by the Greek translator, but it does witness such a change by a Hebrew scribe responsible for the source text of the translation. Similar scribal changes are known from the Samaritan Pentateuch in which the physical visitations by God (אלהים) are changed to visitations from the messenger of God (מלאך אלהים) in Num 22:20 and 23:16.²⁸ Juha Pakkala has argued that these Hebrew scribal changes are made to achieve “the omission of an anthropomorphic presentation of God.”²⁹

This case brings up an important methodological reminder that the assumed toning down of anthropomorphisms in the Septuagint should not be automatically attributed to the translators since different versions of the Hebrew text were still in circulation at the end of the Second Temple period, and Hebrew scribes performed changes that were theologically motivated.³⁰ Avoiding anthropomorphic depictions of YHWH may have been a recurring scribal motivation in different scribal circles. Aside from the Hebrew traditions, the early Jewish revisers of the Septuagint were also sometimes motivated by such reasons. For instance, Anneli Aejmelaus has argued that the first-century BCE kaige-reviser removed the idea that God regretted his decision to make Saul king over Israel in 1 Sam 15. Such a change is found also elsewhere in the kaige version of 1 Samuel–2 Kings.³¹

27. The differences in LXX Exodus in relation to MT Exodus have been the subject of many studies. Scholars are still divided on the matter of which differences go back to a different source text and which reflect freedoms taken by the translator in order to make sense of the Hebrew text. See Alison Salvesen, “Exodus,” in *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark), 32–35.

28. Knafl, *Forming God*, 264–66 has suggested the category of “mediated anthropomorphism,” in which such mediators are a proxy for divine anthropomorphisms. For our purposes, however, this phenomenon does differ from the direct attribution of anthropomorphic features to the divine.

29. Juha Pakkala, *God’s Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 101.

30. See, for example, Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 283–326.

31. Anneli Aejmelaus, “Does God Regret? A Theological Problem That Concerned the Kaige Revisers,” in *The Legacy of Barthélemy: Fifty Years after Les Devanciers*

For our purposes, this can be taken as an example of removing a psychological anthropomorphism, since the reviser wanted to make it clear that “God does not ‘regret like human beings.’”³² Another early Jewish reviser well-known for his tendency to eliminate anthropomorphisms is Symmachus.³³ For example, in Symmachus’s version of Gen 1:27, humankind is not made in God’s image (LXX: κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ) but in “a different image” (ἐν εἰκόνι διαφόρῳ).

This brief discussion of the research history on anthropomorphisms and their suggested toning down in the Septuagint has sought to show the complexity of the issue. Scholars largely agree that there is no universal solution to the problem; instead, every book and text must be analyzed in its own right. Scholars disagree about two things: First, what is the motivation behind the literal versus nonliteral depictions of divine anthropomorphisms? Are these instances theological interpretations in one direction or another, or should these changes be attributed to, for example, stylistic or linguistic reasons? Second, at what stage did these changes take place? Did the translators of the Septuagint tone down anthropomorphisms, or did they simply translate a Hebrew text to which these changes were already made? As demonstrated by, for example, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the early revisions, such motivations seem to have been present more widely in early Judaism. Furthermore, scholars have made some elementary distinctions between different types of anthropomorphisms (e.g., body parts vs. emotions), but they have not reflected on whether these types are all equally important in the study of the phenomenon.

Because traditional textual approaches have not yielded satisfactory answers, it is helpful to turn to cognitive science for new perspectives. What exactly do we mean when we talk about anthropomorphisms, and should different levels of humanlike attributions to the divine be differentiated? Cognitive sciences and experimental psychology may further help in illuminating the general motives and tendencies of human beings to speak about God (and other entities) in anthropomorphic terms or to avoid such imagery. Questions of motivation can rarely be solved simply

d'Aquila, ed. Anneli Aejmelaeus and Tuukka Kauhanen, DSI 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 47–51.

32. Aejmelaeus, “Does God Regret?,” 53.

33. Peter J. Gentry, “1.3.1.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Translations, Hexapla, Post-Hexaplaric Translations,” in *Hebrew Bible: Overview Articles*, ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, THB 1A (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 211–35.

by textual methods, which is why cognitive psychology may offer new and helpful perspectives.

10.3. Anthropomorphism from a Cognitive Science Perspective

The purpose of this section is to review research in cognitive sciences to assist us in seeking conceptual clarity and experimental evidence of anthropomorphism. We are specifically interested in research that studies god-concepts, though studies on anthropomorphism are often wider in perspective.

10.3.1. Human Body and/or Mind

Anthropomorphism entails some kind of likeness to humans—and what this humanness entails in each case is significant. Recent studies suggest that anthropomorphism is not only about imagining a human shape or a human body for nonhumans, but the ascription of mental properties is equally important:

Because anthropomorphism entails seeing nonhuman phenomena as humanlike, it is worth specifying that “humanlike” may describe physical features, but most importantly describes a mind, capable for example of desire, belief, and most specifically language and symbolism.³⁴

Anthropomorphism therefore includes both physical features, such as perceiving a religious agent in a humanlike form, and mental capacities that people believe are uniquely human, such as the capacity to have conscious awareness, possess explicit intentions, or experience secondary emotions (e.g., joy, pride, shame, guilt).³⁵

This is important for our purposes since it means that anthropomorphism in the biblical texts is not only about God in terms of divine body parts

34. Stewart Elliott Guthrie, “Religion as Anthropomorphism: A Cognitive Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology and Religion*, ed. James R. Liddle and Todd K. Shackelford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

35. Adam Waytz, Nicholas Epley, and John T. Cacioppo, “Social Cognition Unbound: Insights into Anthropomorphism and Dehumanization,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19 (2010): 58.

and embodiment but also about God's mental properties.³⁶ Anthropomorphism can be roughly divided into the ascription of human psychological attributes (such as beliefs, desires, emotions, intentions, and perceptions), physical attributes (such as height and weight), and biological or physiological attributes (such as organs, body parts, and bodily functions) to nonhuman entities or events.³⁷ This is not to say that these properties are necessarily separate or that it is easy to make a distinction between them—we shall see that this is definitely not the case, neither linguistically (does “God's heart” refer to a biological organ or to a psychological emotion?) nor theoretically (psychological functions can be studied as physiological manifestations or as bodily reactions)—but that it is natural for humans to make a distinction between body and mind.³⁸

36. One might argue that only some of the mental properties are uniquely human, whereas *Homo sapiens* shares a lot of bodily and physiological features with other mammals, and these are not uniquely anthropomorphic. Nevertheless, many discussions on anthropomorphism in the Bible have focused on bodily representations of God, not on the mental side, or have left anthropomorphism undefined. For a history of research, see Knafl, *Forming God*, 1–22. Besides the human body, divine beings are also spoken of in terms of animal bodies: it is not surprising to find theriomorphic (animal-related) depictions of God, as discussed by Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 47–57. To our knowledge, no scholar has yet offered a discussion whether depictions of God as “seeing” or “smelling,” for example, should be regarded as uniquely human properties or whether they are wider, deriving from the animal world, which includes humans.

37. For an attempt to scale the order of likelihood of various properties, see Ruijten et al., “Perceived Human-Likeness of Social Robots.” In Hebrew Bible studies, Hamori, *When Gods Were Men*, 26–27, explains how biblical scholars have made a division between “physical” and “psychical” properties, or “anthropomorphism” (any reference to physicality) and “anthropopathism” (any reference to mental operations). Previous scholars have also distinguished between God's appearances in theophanies and the way in which God is otherwise spoken of as having similar properties to humans. Hamori, *When Gods Were Men*, 26–34 and Knafl, *Forming God*, 67–71, 256–66 are among the few scholars who discuss varieties of anthropomorphism. Knafl constructs a broad preliminary typology in which, besides physical and emotional similarities between humans and God, action-related similarities are also included, such as imitation between humans and God (e.g., ceasing to work on the Sabbath) and human tropes used to characterize the divine sphere (e.g., characterizing God as King).

38. Or, as McClellan, *YHWH'S Divine Images*, 45, suggests, between body and agency. In human perception, the loci of agency (cognition, animacy, emotions, intentions, etc.) vary from different parts of the body to something outside or independent of the body.

In relation to god-concepts, the study by Andrew Shtulman and Marjaana Lindeman suggests that people more readily ascribe psychological (mind-related) rather than physiological (body-related) attributions to god.³⁹ Humans are naturally mind-body dualists: they can perceive a mind that is separate from the body and can function without a body. In an experiment, people's processing of information of psychological properties of god was cognitively easier (faster, more frequent, confident, and consistent) than of physiological properties. A reverse pattern was shown for *denying* psychological properties to god, that is, participants were slower, less frequent, confident, and consistent in denying psychological (mental) properties to god than when denying physiological properties of god.⁴⁰ This suggests that divine mental and bodily properties are not processed in the same way.

Furthermore, some psychological states (primary emotions such as love and hate) may be ascribed to god more often than some other psychological states (secondary emotions such as happiness or embarrassment)⁴¹—in line with the view that the idea of a regretting god is sometimes troublesome (see above and below), whereas hardly anyone denies that god is capable of loving or hating. This tendency may also be explained by the moral typecasting theory.⁴² Human cognition separates

39. Shtulman and Lindeman, "Attributes of God." Similarly, Andrew Shtulman, "Variation in the Anthropomorphization of Supernatural Beings and Its Implications for Cognitive Theories of Religion," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 34 (2008): 1123–38.

40. Shtulman and Lindeman, "Attributes of God," 663. For Cartesian dualism, see Paul Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). However, in K. Hodge's "Descartes' Mistake: How Afterlife Beliefs Challenge the Assumption That Humans Are Intuitive Cartesian Substance Dualists," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (2008): 387–415, he criticizes the idea of an intuitive body-mind dualism: afterlife beliefs and funerary practices contain ample evidence against the idea that people merely perceive the immaterial mind/soul as leaving the material body. This is a larger question that cannot be addressed here; perceptions of the deceased at least reveal that a body with no signs of a mind poses a dilemma to be solved.

41. See Larisa Heiphetz et al., "How Children and Adults Represent God's Mind," *Cognitive Science* 40 (2016): 124–25. People may also be biased to ascribe to god those psychological traits that are closest to theirs (thus egocentric ascription, see Heiphetz et al., "How Children and Adults Represent God's Mind," 127).

42. Kurt Gray and Daniel M. Wegner, "Blaming God for Our Pain: Human Suffering and the Divine Mind," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14 (2010): 7–16.

participants in moral situations into two roles: that of a moral agent (an actor of good and evil) and that of a moral patient (a recipient of good and evil). Moral agents are seen as capable of agency (the ability to do, plan, and be responsible) but as relatively incapable of experience (the ability to sense and feel), whereas moral patients are capable of experience but relatively incapable of agency. Typically, such roles are expanded (“typecast”) from single moral situations to more general characterizations, so that a person is consistently seen either as a moral agent (e.g., Mother Theresa) or a moral patient (e.g., a beggar). According to this theory, god is intuitively perceived as an ultimate moral agent and thus has much agency but little experience. This is why the God in the Hebrew Bible seldom feels pain or joy. The tendency to change god’s emotions is also revealing about the extent to which God is primarily seen as a moral agent (even outside specifically moral situations). In general, nonmoral domains may be anthropomorphized more than moral domains: gods in moral domains are considered to possess extrahuman capacities and are thus less anthropomorphic.⁴³ In one study, participants anthropomorphized fictional beings (such as fairies and zombies) more often than religious beings (such as angels and gods).⁴⁴

Shtulman and Lindeman argue that, if people more readily ascribe psychological rather than physiological properties to god, this would indicate that people more likely conceive of god as a “bodiless agent,” rather than a “person” with some extraordinary properties.⁴⁵ In their view, the terminology of anthropomorphism is not very precise in relation to god. Instead of anthropomorphic god-concepts, we might speak of agentive or animistic god-concepts: gods are thought of as agents or as spirits.⁴⁶ This question remains debated. It suffices here to note that psychological properties are more readily attributed to gods than physiological properties, and the experimental settings (see also below) are mostly interested in the

43. See further Heiphetz et al., “How Children and Adults Represent God’s Mind,” 136–37.

44. Shtulman, “Variation in the Anthropomorphization.”

45. Shtulman and Lindeman, “Attributes of God,” 648.

46. Shtulman and Lindeman, “Attributes of God,” 666. This is similar to the distinction between concrete vs. transcendental anthropomorphism or the material divine manifestations in theophany and incarnation (in human or other form, e.g., fire) vs. divine dispositions and actions (e.g., God smelling the sacrifice or God being a father); see Hamori, *When Gods Were Men*, 27, 36.

extent to which participants ascribe psychological properties and mental states (rather than bodily forms or functions) to nonhuman entities.

Yet, physiological and bodily attributions to god are by no means denied. This phenomenon too is well attested empirically and shown to vary. A study by Shtulman suggests that

three predictors of whether people assign physical and biological attributes to God are age, culture, and religiosity. Children are more likely to do so than adults; Hindus are more likely to do so than Christians, who are more likely to do so than Muslims; and the highly religious are more likely to do so than the less religious.⁴⁷

In other words, gods are sometimes conceived of as bodily beings, although this may be suppressed by other factors, and this variation can be studied.

10.3.2. Contextual and Individual Variation

Anthropomorphism is largely understood as a cognitive process that is not on-off but that can be activated to different degrees and vary according to contexts:

The primary cognitive determinant of anthropomorphism is therefore the extent to which knowledge of humans (or the self in particular) is elicited or activated. Anthropomorphism involves using existing knowledge about the self or the concept “human” to make an *inference* about a relatively unknown nonhuman agent.⁴⁸

Anthropomorphism is understood as a response to the human need to make sense of the environment and is found to vary according to contextual and motivational states. For example, people who have little social contacts or who feel lonely, and people who feel uncertain about their capability to interact effectively with others are more likely to anthropomorphize.⁴⁹ People with an effectance motivation (a motivation to predict,

47. Andrew Shtulman “Do Religious Experiences Shape Religious Beliefs or Religious Concepts?,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9 (2019): 265–66.

48. Waytz, Epley, and Cacioppo, “Social Cognition Unbound,” 59. Italics ours.

49. Nicholas Epley et al., “When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism,” *Social Cognition* 26 (2008): 143–55; Waytz, Cacioppo, and Epley, “Who Sees Human?”; Jennifer A. Bartz, Kristina Tchalova, and Can Fenerci,

understand, and control their environment and thus behave as effective and competent social agents) are also more likely to anthropomorphize and attribute nonhuman entities a mind, intentions, and emotions. In various experimental settings, anthropomorphism increased when an entity behaved unpredictably and when participants were motivated to predict its behavior. Participants were, for example, asked to predict a robot's behavior and were promised a reward for correct predictions.⁵⁰

These findings, too, may be significant for our purpose: anthropomorphism is related to efforts of understanding and coping with one's (social) environment and of minimizing the cognitive load.⁵¹ The human tendency to resolve uncertainty has been connected to evolutionary benefits.⁵² Anthropomorphism is also suggested to be useful for memory retrieval tasks: Lewis Baker, Alicia Hymel, and Daniel Levin tested memory retrieval for narratives of a robot with and without anthropomorphic features and found positive evidence for the better recall of details of the actions of the anthropomorphic-like agents with intentions but not for other details.⁵³ Aiyana Willard, Lubomír Cingl, and Ara Norenzayan theorize that if the tendency to anthropomorphize is motivational—that is, if it provides meaning and control over uncertain and unexplainable phenomena—it should be found among religious and nonreligious people alike. They do, however, also note that cultural learning may suppress this for the religious.⁵⁴ In conclusion, no matter what the religious texts and authorities say, people may, in certain situations, think of god anthropomorphically.

One recent contribution to understanding how cultural variation may suppress or encourage anthropomorphism comes from a study that reevaluates the HADD-theory (hyperactive agency detection device) according to which humans are “better safe than sorry” in detecting agents even

“Reminders of Social Connection Can Attenuate Anthropomorphism: A Replication and Extension of Epley, Akalis, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2008),” *Psychological Science* 27 (2016): 1644–50.

50. Waytz, Cacioppo, and Epley, “Who Sees Human?”

51. See Heiphetz et al., “How Children and Adults Represent God's Mind,” 133.

52. Guthrie, “Religion as Anthropomorphism.”

53. Lewis J. Baker, Alicia M. Hymel, and Daniel T. Levin, “Anthropomorphism and Intentionality Improve Memory for Events,” *Discourse Processes* 55 (2018): 241–55.

54. Aiyana K. Willard, Lubomír Cingl, and Ara Norenzayan, “Cognitive Biases and Religious Belief: A Path Model Replication in the Czech Republic and Slovakia with a Focus on Anthropomorphism,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 11.1 (2020): 97–106.

when there are none.⁵⁵ At the moment, there does not seem to be strong support for the theory that the human sensitivity to detect agents, or minds for these agents, is the cause of religious beliefs.⁵⁶ Neil Van Leeuwen and Michiel van Elk suggest that HADD does not lead to religious beliefs about gods but rather the other way around: religious beliefs cause people to seek situations in which agency intuitions are more likely and to interpret intuitions of agents as affecting their personal lives.⁵⁷ In this view, people act like they are entering a haunted house: they build structured environments like cathedrals and ritual spaces where one expects to experience the presence of the divine. Shtulman suggests that this might also explain individual differences: those who seek religious experiences are perhaps more likely to have anthropomorphic notions of god, whereas those who do not seek experiences may adhere to more public and abstract notions of god.⁵⁸ In other words, if competing general beliefs in a given setting have a more anthropomorphic notion of god and a less anthropomorphic notion of god, people attracted to the first might be those who have a stronger tendency toward agency-detection.⁵⁹

Not only situational and motivational factors but also personality traits and predispositions have been studied. Deniz Tahiroglu and Marjorie Taylor hypothesized “that individuals who are more skilled in their understanding of people might be particularly likely to overextend their social understanding to nonhuman animals and inanimate objects,” but they did not find any strong support for this: “individual differences in social understanding or theory of mind are not associated with individual differences in anthropomorphism.”⁶⁰ However, age certainly is a factor: “distinguishing God’s mind from human minds [i.e., nonanthropomorphizing God]

55. Justin L. Barrett, “Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 29–34.

56. Neil Van Leeuwen and Michiel van Elk, “Seeking the Supernatural: Responses to Commentary,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9 (2019): 267–75; Marc Andersen, “Predictive coding in agency detection,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9 (2019): 65–84.

57. Neil Van Leeuwen and Michiel van Elk, “Seeking the Supernatural: The Interactive Religious Experience,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9 (2019): 221–51.

58. Shtulman, “Do Religious Experiences Shape.”

59. Van Leeuwen and van Elk, “Seeking the Supernatural: Responses,” 273; however, this might again require cross-cultural testing.

60. Deniz Tahiroglu and Marjorie Taylor “Anthropomorphism, Social Understanding, and Imaginary Companions,” *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 37 (2019): 284–85.

requires both cognitive development and deliberate reasoning.”⁶¹ In some experiments, the physiological properties that participants attributed to god were ones that infants learn early on (e.g., “can move a material object”), whereas the physiological properties that participants hesitated to ascribe to god were ones that children learn later in their development (e.g., “has bones”).⁶²

All in all, there is little evidence that, in general, people anthropomorphize more if they are religious. People anthropomorphize more in some situations and in some motivational states, and variation may be found between age groups, cultures, and religious affiliation—a lot remains unknown.

10.3.3. Methods of Measuring Anthropomorphism

Lastly, to correctly estimate the value of the experimental evidence and relate it to our research problem, a critical look must be directed at the methods and measuring scales. Some studies report using standardized scales such as “Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism Quotient” (IDAQ), which measures “the tendency to project human like mental states such as consciousness, free will and emotions to machines, nature and animals (e.g., To what extent does the ocean have consciousness? To what extent do cows have intentions?),” as well as asking participants to characterize natural items using anthropomorphic (“conscious, angry”) or nonanthropomorphic (“large, high”) concepts.⁶³ Thus, all these scales and questions use concepts and categories that are, to some extent, culture-specific and open to multiple interpretations. Peter Ruijten et al. refer to several questionnaire instruments, some of which focus on human appearance and some on human cognitive elements, and they attempt to argue for an instrument by which all possible human traits are taken into consideration, but this is not yet very convincing.⁶⁴ The overall majority of studies referred to in our chapter here focus on human mental capacities, but these can also be of many kinds. Thus, what is actually measured may truly vary between different studies.

61. Heiphetz et al., “How Children and Adults Represent God’s Mind,” 135.

62. Shtulman and Lindeman, “Attributes of God,” 666.

63. Aiyana K. Willard and Ara Norenzayan, “Cognitive Biases Explain Religious Belief, Paranormal Belief, and Belief in Life’s Purpose,” *Cognition* 129 (2013): 382.

64. Ruijten et al., “Perceived Human-Likeness of Social Robots.”

Different methods of studying have been found to produce different results. Tahiroglu and Taylor compare interviews/questionnaires and narration of films and suggest that the film-narration method may produce higher anthropomorphizing because of the visual cues of films and human propensity for self-propelled movement.⁶⁵ They also consider the possibility that some methods measure a “weak” metaphoric anthropomorphism: thus, narrating a film by saying “this box hopes to move in that direction” does not mean people believe that the box has intentions and hopes but that it is a metaphoric and quick way of speaking about what is perceived to happen in the film.⁶⁶ Marjaana Lindeman, Annika Svedholm-Häkkinen, and Jari Lipsanen have made similar observations, criticizing that anthropomorphism is sometimes measured with too “broad operationalizations” in which questionnaires do not differentiate between different degrees of anthropomorphizing.⁶⁷ It is a different thing to talk about metaphors and intuitions than to actually believe that inanimate objects have minds.

This is an important problem as regards god-concepts. Efforts exist to distinguish strong anthropomorphism from weak anthropomorphism by measuring whether the stimuli activate the brain areas usually connected to social cognition, thus having to do with similar cognition as in interaction with humans.⁶⁸ Yet, if weak anthropomorphism is used in the sense that it is merely metaphoric, we might lose sight of an important aspect of human thinking. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and conceptual metaphor theorists, human conceptual thinking is fundamentally based on concrete experiences and bodily orientations.⁶⁹ Metaphoric thinking does not make it any less real.⁷⁰ Especially religious texts that participate in the ways in which people speak and learn to think of gods,

65. Tahiroglu and Taylor, “Anthropomorphism.”

66. Tahiroglu and Taylor, “Anthropomorphism,” 295.

67. Marjaana Lindeman, Annika M. Svedholm-Häkkinen, and Jari Lipsanen, “Ontological Confusions but Not Mentalizing Abilities Predict Religious Belief, Paranormal Belief, and Belief in Supernatural Purpose,” *Cognition* 134 (2014): 65, 72.

68. Adam Waytz et al., “Making Sense by Making Sentient: Effectance Motivation Increases Anthropomorphism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 99 (2010): 410–35.

69. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

70. See discussion by Hamori, *When Gods Were Men*, 54–56, for defending the metaphoric (or “analogical”) God-talk as demonstrating “a particular aspect of reality.” The human God in theophany demonstrates some aspects of God but does not

metaphoric or not, are revealing of wider human conceptualization. But languages differ in their metaphoric structuring, one structure may be translated in a very different way in another language, and translation styles differ (see modern Bible translations where the triumph of antianthropomorphism could be shown in many languages).

Priming is a common technique in experiments to expose participants to a certain stimulus without them being aware of it. For example, the study by Ara Norenzayan, Ian G. Hansen, and Jasmine Cady looked at the anthropomorphization of nature and suggests that priming people of their mortality makes people less likely to anthropomorphize nature: in such a condition, people want to distance themselves from nature and be able to think that humans are higher or other than mortal animals.⁷¹ People—both religious and nonreligious—were asked to choose adjectives for items of nature, such as whether a volcano is malicious, angry (anthropomorphizing), or tall, hot, and smoky (nonanthropomorphizing). As expected, anthropomorphic attributions were lower when death was salient; there was no difference between religious and nonreligious participants. However, the methodology of priming is not without its problems either.⁷²

In summary of this section, anthropomorphism is widely studied in different fields and seen as significant even for the well-being and effective coping of humans in the world. Since humanness involves so many aspects, all of which are not unique to humans, anthropomorphism is a difficult concept that needs to be carefully analyzed at different levels (e.g., mental properties that are seen as uniquely human, such as consciousness or self-reflection; mental properties that are not uniquely human; and bodily and physical properties). A mind without a body is easily conceivable, but a body without any mind or mental operations is much more difficult. In general, psychological properties are more readily ascribed to god-concepts than physiological or biological properties.

make God as human any more than the statement that “man is wolf” makes man a wolf. Similarly, Knafl, *Forming God*, 42–43.

71. Ara Norenzayan, Ian G. Hansen, and Jasmine Cady, “An Angry Vulcano? Reminders of Death and Antropomorphizing Nature,” *Social Cognition* 26 (2008): 190–97.

72. Stéphane Doyen et al., “Behavioral Priming: It’s All in the Mind, but Whose Mind?,” *PLoS ONE* 7 (2012): e29081, famously addressed some problems as they were not able to replicate an earlier test which suggested that those participants who had been primed with an “elderly” concept also behaved in an elderly manner (walked slower after the experiment).

Various experiments have been designed to investigate which factors activate the tendency to anthropomorphize and whether there is individual variation. Anthropomorphism is often considered innate and intuitive, but for scholars of religion who also study reflective thinking, explicit behaviors, and religious texts, identifying this tendency is not enough. Recent attempts have sought to explain how innate dispositions may interact with beliefs.

10.4. Case Examples: Refining the Anthropomorphisms of the Septuagint in the Light of Cognitive Research

Our review of cognitive studies makes it clear that more precision is needed when analyzing anthropomorphisms in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. Here we structure our cases—guided by the review of cognitive studies—in biological/physiological, physical, and psychological categories, and critically evaluate some of the assumptions about antianthropomorphism.

10.4.1. Biological/Physiological Attributes

There are many expressions in the Hebrew Bible that attribute human biological or physiological traits to YHWH. The most common of these are the mouth, voice, hand, eyes, and ears. Generally, these expressions are used to refer to statements or commandments (mouth/voice of YHWH), actions of the senses (eyes/ears of YHWH) or the cause of events (hand of YHWH). In the vast majority of cases, these are rendered in the Septuagint in a very straightforward manner by the corresponding Greek words for the same body parts.⁷³

Israel saw the great hand (יד / τὴν χεῖρα) that YHWH did against the Egyptians. (Exod 14:31)

When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears (אזני / εἰς τὰ ὦτα) of YHWH. (1 Sam 8:21)

73. Translations are ours and are often more literal than modern English translations, in order to highlight the bodily language used.

YHWH is in his holy temple; YHWH's throne is in heaven. His eyes (עֵינָיו / οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ) behold, his gaze examines humankind. (Ps 11[10]:4)

YHWH is in the right, for I have rebelled against his mouth (פִּיהוֹ / τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ). (Lam 1:18)

YHWH utters his voice (קוֹלוֹ / φωνήν αὐτοῦ) at the head of his army; how vast is his host! (Joel 2:11)

However, in a few cases, the translators have chosen equivalents other than the corresponding body parts in the Greek language.

And the people complained in the hearing of (בְּאָזְנוֹ / ἔναντι “before”) YHWH. (Num 11:1)

For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice (קוֹל / τῶν ἐντολῶν “ordinance”) of YHWH. (Josh 5:6)

So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand (יָד / ἡ δύναμις “power”) of YHWH is mighty. (Josh 4:24)

For YHWH has an eye on (עֵיִן / ἐφορᾷ “oversees”) mankind and all the tribes of Israel. (Zech 9:1)

The expression “mouth of YHWH” is an outlier among these as about half of the occurrences are rendered by equivalents other than the corresponding Greek term for “mouth.” These equivalents include ῥήμα “word,” λόγος “word,” προστάγμα “ordinance,” and φωνή “voice.”

At the command (פֶּה “mouth” / πρόσταγμα “command”) of YHWH the people of Israel set out, and at the command (פֶּה “mouth” / πρόσταγμα “command”) of YHWH they camped. (Num 9:18)

Most semiprepositions in the Hebrew Bible are formed by the combination of a preposition with a noun that denotes a body part. The most frequent of these are בְּעֵינַי, לְפָנַי, and בְּיָד. These words usually receive stereotyped equivalents in each Septuagint book in which they are translated, and these equivalents are either literal renderings that use the

corresponding Greek term for the same body part or more idiomatic Greek prepositions.

In many cases, the referent of these semiprepositions is YHWH, and, as noted above, nonliteral translations of these cases have led to suggestions that the translators intentionally avoid anthropomorphic language when these expressions refer to YHWH. However, in her study on the translations of Hebrew semiprepositions in the Septuagint, Raija Sollamo determined that the issue of anthropomorphisms and their avoidance did not affect the choice of equivalent for semiprepositions. Rather, the renderings were determined by the translators' general practice of translating prepositions and semiprepositions.⁷⁴

Furthermore, a diachronic shift is detectable in the translations of semiprepositions in the Septuagint. The earlier translations mostly chose to use idiomatic Greek equivalents, while the latest translations preferred the literal equivalents, regardless of who the referent is. A good example is the treatment of the semipreposition בעיני "in the judgment of" / "in the presence of" throughout the Septuagint. In his study on the topic, Seleznev points out that the earlier translations mostly employ the nonliteral equivalents ἐνώπιον and ἐναντίον, and the later translations mostly use the literal equivalent ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς "in the eyes of."⁷⁵ This phenomenon is corroborated by evidence in Septuagint Jeremiah, the latter half of which most likely attests a later revision. In the first half of Septuagint Jeremiah, the renderings of both the semiprepositions לפני and בעיני are translated mostly by standard idiomatic Greek renderings, while their counterparts in the latter half of the translation comprise of the literal renderings κατὰ πρόσωπον and ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς, respectively.⁷⁶ Only the renderings of לפני in the first half of Septuagint Jeremiah show a slight tendency toward less anthropomorphic equivalents when the referent is YHWH.⁷⁷

Semiprepositions are a good example of the metaphoric nature of language by which forms are used that are no longer considered as metaphoric (that is, they are dead metaphors, such as "leg of a table," "foot of a

74. Raija Sollamo, *Renderings of Hebrew Semiprepositions in the Septuagint*, AASF Diss. 19 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1979), 78, 145–46, 188–89.

75. Seleznev, "Anti-anthropomorphisms in the Septuagint," 420–21.

76. The same applies to the kaige revision in Samuel-Kings.

77. Miika Tucker, "The Septuagint of Jeremiah: A Study in Translation Technique and Recensions" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2020), 171–93.

mountain”).⁷⁸ Discussion on whether anthropomorphic language was and should be taken literally or metaphorically is too black-and-white. Metonymy is a common aspect of language that helps to understand expressions that utilize body parts. In metonymy, an entity stands for another entity.⁷⁹ A part may stand for a whole as in “we need some good heads on the project.”⁸⁰ Body parts often stand for persons or activities, such as in “gain an upper hand,” “with a heavy hand” (“hand” stands for control or oppressive power).⁸¹ In the same way, an arm in the Bible stands for persons or institutions with power.⁸² A good example of such language is Jer 17:5:

אָרור הַגִּבֵּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּאָדָם
וְשֵׁם בָּשָׂר זָרְעוּ
וּמִן־יְהוָה יִסּוּר לְבָו

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make (mere) flesh their arm (strength),
whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

78. Norman Friedman and Amanda L. French, “Dead Metaphor,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 337–38.

79. There are different kinds of metonyms. “Crown” stands for a monarchy; a “stage” stands for a theater (Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 180). In the sentence “Washington is negotiating with Moscow,” “Washington” stands for the government of the United States of America and “Moscow” for the government of the Russian Federation (Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 171–72)—a place stands for an institution. A “sad book” is an example of a causal relationship, sadness is the result of reading the book (Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 182). Similarly, news on the COVID-19 pandemic may report: “the coronavirus beats hard on the restaurant business.” Anyone who knows that viruses are not living organisms that can move by themselves or have abilities to punish restaurant entrepreneurs takes this sort of a statement as a handy way of describing the effects of the pandemic and does not think viruses have agency. The language of “a beating/punishing corona” stands in a causal relationship for the spread of the virus and its impact on the economy. For the difference between metaphor and metonymy, see Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 174.

80. Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 173.

81. Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 180, 244–45.

82. Often this is explicitly military power (Ezek 17:9; Ps 83:9 [LXX Ps 82:9 lacks an equivalent for “arm”]). Pharaoh’s arm stands for Egypt’s military power and ability to move their troops (Ezek 30:21–22). Breaking Moab’s arm (and horn!) stands for the destruction of Moabite cities (Jer 48:25). An arm stands for a person in “how you have assisted the arm that has no strength!” (Job 26:2).

Jeremiah 17:5 LXX uses similar language but embodies a slightly different idea:

Ἐπικατάρατος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὃς τὴν ἐλπίδα ἔχει
ἐπ' ἄνθρωπον, καὶ στηρίσει σάρκα
βραχίονος αὐτοῦ ἐπ' αὐτόν,
καὶ ἀπὸ Κυρίου ἀποστῇ ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ
Cursed is the person who has his hope
in a human and *will steady the flesh*
of his arm on him,
and his heart will stand away from the Lord.

To “make flesh their/his arm” (MT) is absurd if taken literally. Rather, it has a metonymic sense. “Arm” stands for strength, and “flesh” stands for mortal human beings or human abilities. In the Septuagint, the “flesh” is taken literally, as the muscles of the arm that can be strengthened—but here too, the strengthened arm stands for human (physical) power.

All in all, God who stretches his arm is like a corporation, government, or king whose actions have effects. This language is ubiquitous. The choice of the translators to translate such expressions literally or nonliterally likely has more to do with their translation style and their preferences for metonymic expressions than with anthropomorphism as such.⁸³

10.4.2. Physical Attributes

Physicality of the divine is present in the Hebrew Bible in at least two different ways. First, in some texts YHWH is imagined as being an agent moving in the physical-spatial world. Second, in some texts YHWH is likened to physical objects, usually in a metaphorical sense (and thus this moves away from anthropomorphism as God is not depicted in human but rather in some other form). Perhaps in older texts, the divine may also

83. However, when some translators paid closer attention (sometime around the turn of the era) to the exact wording of texts that were transmitted and translated into Greek, the question may be raised whether they also paid attention to the undesired connotations that metonymic language potentially had. An analogous situation could be, for example, when during the pandemic (cf. footnote 78) healthcare personnel wished to avoid an impression of a vicious virus, and chose different expressions, perhaps spoke of the pandemic rather than an active virus.

be materially identified with an object of reverence, for example, the Asherah pole or a statue of YHWH.⁸⁴

1. In some texts, a scribal change has toned down the physicality of YHWH. The substitution of YHWH himself walking in the physical world by the “messenger of YHWH” walking in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Exod 4:24 LXX and in the Samaritan Pentateuch was already mentioned earlier: YHWH has other agents and messengers that move and act in the physical sphere. Fritsch introduced several examples in which, according to his interpretation, the Septuagint translators removed the idea of God’s spatial movement.⁸⁵ For example, in Exod 12:13 and 27 LXX, God does not “pass over” (פסח) the houses of the Israelites but covers them (σχεπάζω). Other examples of translators removing divine spatial movement are Gen 5:22 (MT: “Enoch walked with God” / LXX: “Enoch was pleasing to God;” the same applies to Noah in Gen 6:9), Exod 25:22 (MT: “there I will meet you” / LXX: “I will be known to you from there), and Exod 3:10 (MT: “YHWH, the lord of the Hebrews, has met with us” / LXX: “the God of the Hebrews has summoned us”). Nevertheless, these are individual cases and open to interpretation.⁸⁶ In some other instances the Septuagint translators have no problem with depicting YHWH as a humanlike being who moves in physical space. As Fritsch also notes, in Exod 12:23, God does move spatially also in the Septuagint by passing (παρέρχομαι) the houses. Famously, in Gen 3:8 and 10, YHWH is depicted as walking in the garden, and this imagery is employed both in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.⁸⁷ The

84. In the preexilic Israelite religion, there may have been a statue of YHWH, and some texts may still carry vestiges of this historical reality (see, e.g., Pakkala, *God’s Word Omitted*, 197–99, 201–8, 223).

85. For example, in Exod 3:10 (see above), we may ask if the actual problem that the LXX translators address is the anthropomorphic depiction of God, or the idea that humans can meet the divine in the same realm (Fritsch, *Anti-anthropomorphism*, 28–35). The change in depicting divine presence is already visible in the Hebrew Bible: name theology, and the priestly concept of glory came to replace God’s direct presence in the temple. See Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 30.

86. Fritsch, *Anti-anthropomorphism*, 32, himself notes that LXX seems to want to avoid “the idea of God’s meeting with man.” According to him, the idea of meeting does not “agree with the more spiritualized conception of God generally found in the Greek translation.” However, this view can be questioned. God is depicted in human form also in the LXX (see the following main text). Also, avoiding the idea of man meeting God does not necessarily imply a spiritual notion of God.

87. Interestingly a late seventh-century CE manuscript, *Codex Purpureus Vindo-*

same applies to Gen 18 and 32:22–32 in which the Septuagint follows the portrayal of God as taking the human form of men that walk, talk, eat, and even wrestle.⁸⁸ If this God takes on a normal human size, a superhuman-sized God appears in Exod 33:18–23, both in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, where God passes by Moses and covers him with his hand—a hand large enough to cover a man.⁸⁹

2. A prominent example of the second form of physicality is the already-mentioned metaphor of God as a “rock” (צור). As Olofsson demonstrated, this depiction is avoided in Septuagint Psalms and in the Septuagint as a divine title. Some translation equivalents for “rock” in the Septuagint include ὁ θεός (e.g., Deut 32:30; Isa 30:29; Ps 18:32), ἄγιος (e.g., 1 Sam 2:2), μέγας (Isa 26:4), and βοηθός (e.g., Pss 18:3, 94:22).⁹⁰ Olofsson speculates that the toning down of material imagery may be related to “a tendency to emphasize his [YHWH’s] transcendence, and thereby free him from associations with material objects.”⁹¹ Although the imagery draws from the material world, it is clearly metaphorical also in Hebrew, as is shown, for example, by the idea that a rock can “give birth” (Deut 32:18). The Masoretic Text does not imply that God actually is a rock, but rock is a metaphor for protection and safety. As we noted when reviewing cognitive studies, there are different levels of anthropomorphisms. It is a different thing to explain things in anthropomorphic terms (“the cloud looks like a face”) than to actually believe that mental beings and inanimate objects are being mixed—which is an example of “core ontological confusion.”⁹²

bonesis, which contains twenty-four leaves of Genesis, removes the sentences that state that God was walking in the garden. Since there are no grounds for haplography, these may be intentional omissions guided by the wish to remove the physicality of God.

88. For an analysis of the body of God in the MT of these passages, see Smith, “Three Bodies of God,” 473–78; and Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 14–18,

89. Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 18–21.

90. Olofsson, *God Is My Rock*. The one exception is 2 Sam 22:2, where πέτρα μου is employed as a divine title. However, there it is missing from the Lucianic manuscripts, which presents a hard text-critical problem. The possibility remains that the literal rendering was not used in the Old Greek. The parallel text in Ps 17:3 renders “my rock” with “my helper” (βοηθός μου).

91. Olofsson, *God Is My Rock*, 151.

92. Lindeman, Svedholm-Häkkinen, and Lipsanen, “Ontological Confusions,” 72. According to the authors, core ontological confusions are category mistakes “where the distinctive properties of mental and physical, animate and inanimate, and living and lifeless are inappropriately mixed” (65). For example, “the earth wants water” is

In this case, the Hebrew authors did not believe that YHWH is literally a rock.⁹³ However, it is true that the Septuagint avoids the rock metaphor, which may well stem from a wish to emphasize the transcendence of the divine and from considering this metaphor as unsuited for the Greek audience to convey what it is meant to convey.

In sum, at times God seems to be less physical in the Septuagint than in the Masoretic Text. However, there is no systematic tendency to remove the physicality of the divine: in the Septuagint, God is also depicted as moving in the physical-spatial world. The rock case shows that other material depictions besides that of a human figure also may have been seen as problematic. At the same time, the physical and material imagery of the divine should not be overinterpreted in the Masoretic Text either. In recent cognitive experimental research, the difference between weak and strong anthropomorphism has been emphasized, and this difference applies to the Hebrew Bible as well. While the idea of God walking in the garden more likely makes people think of God in human terms (and thus strong anthropomorphic terms in this division), the description of God as a rock does not make people think of God in inanimate terms if God is believed to be an animate being; only his characteristics are better understood in terms of rocks.

10.4.3. Psychological Attributes

Some psychological attributes are expressed without any bodily terminology. God has *מחשבות* / *λογισμοί* “thoughts” or “purposes” (Jer 51[28]:29), and God gives *עצה* / *βουλή* “counsel” (Ps 33[32]:11). God “loves” (Deut 4:37), “remembers,” “takes notice of” (Hos 7:2), and is able to forget and forgive (Isa 43:25). Leaving aside the question to what extent language and speech itself can be considered a uniquely human ability, there is no way around depicting a personalized God without using human terms of a being who thinks, remembers, and has goals and emotions—both in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint.

an example of a core ontological confusion since it mixes material reality (the earth) with mental states (wanting).

93. However, divine presence is often associated to material objects (statues, nature, temples, writings), and Hebrew Bible authors are no different from others in this respect.

Yet body parts are also very much present in the language of mental, psychological, and cognitive operations.⁹⁴ Let us see if depictions of God in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint differ in this regard.

1. Emotions. As we saw above when looking at body parts, not only actions and interaction but many emotions are embodied: in Hebrew, anger is connected to nostrils (אף), compassion and love to the womb (רחם), sadness or frustration to low face (Gen 4:5). The lexeme אף is often translated by something else than a term referring to a physical body part. For example, in Exod 15:8 MT, God's anger against pharaoh at the Red Sea is described as וברוח אפך "at the blast of your nostrils," whereas in Exod 15:8 LXX it is διὰ πνεύματος τοῦ θυμοῦ σου "through the breath of your anger." The same applies in depicting humans: in Gen 30:2 MT ויחר אף יעקב ברחל "Jacob became angry (lit. Jacob's nose burned) at Rachel," but in Gen 30:2 LXX ἐθυμώθη δὲ Ἰακώβ τῇ Παχὴλ "Jacob became angry at Rachel."⁹⁵

2. Thoughts and intentions. The term לב "heart" stands for the source of thoughts, decisions, preferences, and emotions. In the Septuagint, it is often simply translated as καρδία, also when referring to God (Jer 7:31; 19:5; 23:20; 30[37]:24; 44[51]:21; Ps 33[32]:11; 1 Chr 17:19). Sirach 17:6 says directly that the heart is given for thinking: "deliberation and a tongue and eyes, ears and a heart for thinking he gave them." Again, we may witness metonymic language, as in Jer 17:5 LXX: καὶ ἀπὸ Κυρίου ἀποστῇ ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ "and his heart will stand away from the Lord." Hearts do not literally "stand," but in a metonymic sense, the heart represents here the person's moral choices. However, in Gen 6:6 and 8:21, the Septuagint translators have chosen not to use the term καρδία:

94. For the Hebrew Bible, see, e.g., Mark Smith, *How Human Is God? Seven Questions About God and Humanity in the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014). For conceptualizations of the self with the container metaphor, see Carol Newsom, "Flesh, Spirit, and the Indigenous Psychology of the Hodayot," in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, STDJ 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 351–53: the body is like a container, and a person's dispositions of confliction can be depicted as inner contents (spirit, impurity, sometimes liquid) in the container.

95. We see this in most modern translations of the Bible: they, too, use other ways to express emotions and dispositions, similar to LXX translators.

Gen 6:6

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם
בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים

And the LORD *was sorry* that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him *to his heart*.

καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ θεός ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον
ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ διενοήθη

And God *considered* that he had made humankind on the earth, and he *thought it over*.

Gen 8:21

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
לֹא־אֶסָּף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאָדָמָה
בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם

And the LORD said *in his heart*, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind”

καὶ εἶπεν Κύριος ὁ θεὸς διανοηθείς
Οὐ προσθήσω ἔτι τοῦ καταράσασθαι τὴν γῆν
διὰ τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἀνθρώπων

And the Lord God, *when he had given it thought*, said, “I will not proceed hereafter to curse the earth because of the deeds of humans.”

The LXX version of Gen 6:6 is noteworthy for also getting rid of the possibly troublesome idea of God regretting (נחם). In Gen 8:21 MT, the Hebrew expression “to say in one’s heart” is an embodied way of describing thinking and deliberation; after all, humans often experience hearing an inner voice when thinking about something. In Gen 8:21 LXX, this idea is changed as God declares his thoughts in speech. Nevertheless, the God of the flood story is described in equally human terms in the Septuagint as he is in the Masoretic Text; after all, he has the ability to ponder, plan, and consider (cf. the frequent use of the verb διανοέομαι in Sirach for the ideal sage in search of wisdom and in Daniel for the prophet trying to understand the vision). To be true, the terms are not identical; in the Septuagint, God is understood in human terms but perhaps in less faulty human terms.⁹⁶

96. See Hos 11:8 LXX where God can also regret: μετεστράφη ἡ καρδία μου ἐν

Similarly noteworthy are a few of the translations of the verb נחם. In Exod 32:14 LXX (the golden-calf incident), God is propitiated (ἰλάσθη) for the harm he caused, and in 1 Sam 15:11 LXX, God is comforted (παρακέκλημαι) for having made Saul the king (similarly 2 Sam 24:16). The verb נחם itself may also take the meaning “to comfort, to relent” (*piel*) and “to be consoled” (*niph'al*), so in some cases the Septuagint translations may derive from such interpretations.⁹⁷ However, a very common equivalent of the verb נחם in the Septuagint is μετανοέω “to change one’s mind, repent” (e.g., Jer 18:8; Joel 2:13, 14): this meaning is used in relation to God regretting making Saul the king (1 Sam 15:35) and even when it does not seem to fit the context (Ps 106:45). God’s regret or change of mind was a contentious issue for some translators, but not for others.

3. Self-reflection, consciousness. As seen above, God has the ability to ponder and to think for himself. Self-reflection is also present in the way God swears by his נפשי (Amos 6:8), in the Septuagint, καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ “by himself.” God as an agent with moral abilities and moral emotions is often expressed in Hebrew by God’s נפש, whereas in Greek, by God’s ψυχή (Judg 10:16; Isa 42:1; Jer 5:9; 6:8; 13:17; Zech 11:8). Similarly, God’s life- and strength-giving force is his רוח / πνεῦμα (Ps 33[32]:6). Here, linguistic differences between Hebrew and Greek are obvious.

In summary, God is attributed many psychological abilities both in Hebrew and Greek. In comparison to Greek, the Hebrew language has perhaps less alternatives to express emotions, intentions, and thoughts through other means than embodied expressions or phrases derived from bodily organs. Yet, bodily expressions may be used and are used in Greek as well, and such expressions may function in a metonymic way, using body parts to represent some psychological property. The evidence also seems to support the thesis that, for some translators, God is depicted as the ultimate moral agent, and thus imperfect properties (such as regretting) are conceptualized in less faulty or in more general ways.

10.5. Conclusions

Our discussion has illuminated that the concept of anthropomorphism should be used more carefully in Septuagint studies. At least four con-

τῷ αὐτῷ, συνεταράχθη ἡ μεταμελία μου “My heart was changed together; my sense of regret was disturbed.”

97. See esp. Isa 1:24; 57:6; Jer 15:6; 26(33):3, 13, 19; 42(49):10.

clusions can be drawn. First, the whole concept of anthropomorphism should be unpacked and used with more nuance when analyzing the sources. Cognitive science has differentiated between biological, physical, and psychological attributions of the divine and demonstrated that people are perhaps more prone to attribute psychological features to the divine. The umbrella term anthropomorphism has been used in biblical studies to cover many types of attributions, some of which are not unique to humans (body parts such as the head or legs; bodily functions such as seeing or hearing; physical properties such as moving; psychological properties such as primary emotions). On the other hand, uniquely human features, such as using language, the ability to plan and ponder, and self-reflection, are often neglected when talking about anthropomorphism in the Bible. Our conclusion is that, in this regard, there is no real antianthropomorphic tendency: God speaks, thinks, and feels in Hebrew and in Greek.

Second, in many instances where the translation may indeed be less anthropomorphic than the source text, the motivation behind the difference remains speculative. The translation style and preferences of the translator often better explain the variation. The translator of a composition may have, for instance, aimed at stylistic variation and used different Greek equivalents for recurring Hebrew phrases. Furthermore, the translators of the Pentateuch, for example, may differ from the other translators of the Bible. The fact that a very humanlike God in Genesis was not a problem for the Septuagint translators may suggest that they, too, recognized differences in the portrayal of God: patriarchs had very intimate interactions with God whereas other texts reveal more fearful theophanies and a mystical divine court.

The question of motivation is made even more complex when one looks at empirical evidence of anthropomorphic thinking in modern settings. Cognitive science demonstrates that there is great cultural, individual, and situational variation as to what degree human features are attributed to the divine. This accords well with Septuagint studies, which have demonstrated that there is much variability within and between the translators and revisers of different books. Textual evidence, such as Hebrew Bible and Septuagint narratives, are one source of conceptualization of God. In different oral settings, ancient people may have similarly varied in their characterizations of God.

Third, in many cases it is not clear whether the changes in anthropomorphisms have taken place in the translation or whether they were already present in the Hebrew source text of the translation. There is

ample evidence that Hebrew scribes also made changes that produced a less anthropomorphic depiction of the divine, at least for certain features.

Fourth, languages are structured differently in relation to bodily metaphors and embodiment. If Hebrew semiprepositions that are dead metaphors based on body parts (e.g., לִפְנֵי) are considered to be anthropomorphisms but are not relativized with respect to possible alternative expressions in the language, the view becomes easily distorted. Furthermore, both Hebrew and Greek are full of metaphors and metonyms, and metaphors and metonyms are very sensitive to changes in context. This may explain some of the changes by Septuagint translators.

Finally, irrespective of human language, humans have a deep propensity for understanding their environment on the basis of human or humanlike properties. This propensity explains why concepts of otherworldly beings (gods, angels, etc.) are based on some human characteristics: beings who can influence matters on earth must be able to move, think, want, and so on. Ancient religions, including that of the Septuagint, themselves are testimony to this.

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11

The Divine Council in Light of Cultural Evolution: Why Should Ancient Near Eastern Scholars Care about Evolution?

Lauri Laine and Jutta Jokiranta

11.1. Introduction

In this contribution, we introduce and explore a perspective that has been rapidly growing in recent decades but has not yet extensively made its way into biblical studies: that of *cultural evolution*. Changes in sacred texts and traditions are *also* (but not only) related to *cognitive* propensities and mechanisms of how humans acquire and pass on information and to *accumulation* of cultural information. There is much misunderstanding and misuse of the concept and framework of Darwinian evolution—to the extent that this terminology is deplored or avoided altogether by biblical scholars and ancient historians. Yet, humankind would not be where it is without the processes of cultural evolution: variation, selection, and inheritance.¹

This chapter is coauthored by Lauri Laine and Jutta Jokiranta. Laine was the first contributor by taking responsibility for the textual analysis and reflecting the results against previous scholarship on the topic of the divine council. Jokiranta was responsible for the presentation of principles of cultural evolution. The introduction and conclusions were written in collaboration. We wish to thank various commentators, including Alex Mesoudi. Naturally, all remaining mistakes are ours alone.

1. In this chapter, we mostly refer to Alex Mesoudi's view of cultural evolution (*Cultural Evolution: How Darwinian Theory Can Explain Human Culture and Synthesize the Social Sciences* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011]). We consider this view as a clear vantage point for those discussions in the field of biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern studies to which we will contribute here. However, we find some other views of cultural evolution useful as well. See, for example, Luigi

Moreover, the cultural-evolution viewpoint offers new perspectives on the scholarly debate about the rise of so-called biblical monotheism. In light of the wide variation of different conceptualizations of divine beings within the different texts in the Hebrew Bible, talk about biblical monotheism appears rather artificial and simplistic. In this contribution, we approach the monotheism debate through a case study of the so-called divine council, which is a recurring motif in a number of religious systems in the ancient Near East and also in many texts in the Hebrew Bible. The idea of divine beings gathering for a council may sound contradictory to the theological ideal of monotheism. However, a closer look at the conceptualizations of the divine beings in different attestations of the divine council motif reveals that the motif carries a spectrum of theological ideas and that its persistence has a reason. Some of the divine council passages rather closely resemble their counterparts in the other ancient Near Eastern texts and may be interpreted as remnants of earlier religious ideas (e.g., Deut 32; 1 Kgs 22). Still, not all of them seem to be too problematic (e.g., Ps 82; Job 1–2), even against the strictest of monotheistic ideals. From the cultural evolution perspective, we take this variety of different conceptualizations of the divine council as a starting point.

Indeed, the strict dichotomy between polytheism and monotheism has been questioned in recent scholarship, and the variety of conceptualizations of divinity in the texts and manuscripts has been widely recognized.² However, the language game (*Sprachspiel*) of the field is still often governed by a retrospective view: How did the development from polytheistic conceptualizations of divinity to monotheistic ones take place historically? As the mono-Yahwistic conceptualization of divinity is prominent in the Masoretic Text and underpinned with a centuries-long tradition of interpretation through a monotheistic Judeo-Christian lens,

L. Cavalli-Sforza and Marcus W. Feldman, *Cultural Transmission and Evolution: A Quantitative Approach*. Monographs in Population Biology 16 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Tim Lewens, *Cultural Evolution: Conceptual Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

2. See, for example, Barbara N. Porter, ed., *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute 1 (Chebeague, ME: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000); Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "A New Agenda for the Study of the Rise of Monotheism," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 1–40.

monotheism may be considered as a historical end-product in the similar way as the text itself.

The cultural-evolutionary perspective offers an alternative to the retrospective viewpoint. It takes a look at the possible process of how and why certain conceptualizations of divinity have been preserved or got selected, ending up in a certain context. The end result of the evolutionary process is not an obvious and determined course of development. For this reason, we argue that speaking about biblical monotheism carries assumptions that are not helpful if we wish to understand the ancient evidence. First, there is a great variety of different conceptualizations of divinity in the Hebrew Bible, which have grown over centuries of its texts being edited and translated. Each cultural context is unique and requires a reconceptualization process. To understand why we now speak of biblical monotheism demands an analysis of cultural evolution on its own, starting from the reception of biblical texts, the growth of philosophical debates, and the institutionalization of religious movements, not only analysis of ancient evidence. Second, monotheism in a pure sense, if understood as a religious institution expressing and maintaining worship of *and* belief in one omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent divinity, is a cognitively counterintuitive and demanding operation; as such, one could empirically question if it is ever fully realized. Much more common and intuitive is to think of divine beings as humanlike, limited beings, interacting with each other as well as with human beings.

In the following, we briefly introduce what cultural evolution is, what it is not, and what terminology is used therein to discuss various processes of change. After this, we take the divine council as our case study to discuss *some* paths where cultural-evolutionary investigation may lead. The divine council is a prime example of how conceptualizations of multiple divine beings have been reconceptualized in different cultural contexts so that they fit different theological ideals. Even though one can find a number of ancient *emic* terms for the divine council (Akk. *puḫur ilāni*, Gr. ἐκκλησία ὑψίστου, etc.), scholars also use it as an *etic* construct, an umbrella term which includes a range of emic meanings.³ In this study, we present some variations of the emic terminology but use the etic concept to explain why the idea itself is persistent.

3. Moreover, different scholars have conceptualized the divine council in different terms and focused on different sources, which makes parallel approaches more challenging.

11.2. What Is Cultural Evolution?

Culture is inherited. Today's smart phones rely on past technological innovations that no single generation was able to develop by starting from scratch; technology builds on select and well-proven information and practices that are passed on from one generation to the next. In using the English language, we are influenced by the changes that have taken place during the past centuries; it would not be helpful to communicate with vocabulary that has gone out of use. When modern Western textbooks or media mention "monotheistic religions," most Westerners share an understanding about which religions are meant—this, too, can be approached as a question of cultural evolution: how these religions were understood in the time of their formation (without the terminology of monotheism) and when and how the language of monotheism overrode some other language or conceptualization used in and of these traditions.

Culture is understood as *socially learned information* (e.g., skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, language). Evolution of culture is *change* but a particular type of change that takes into account the temporal aspect of accumulation of information, extinction of information, and the context (environment) in which the information is used.⁴

Cultural evolution does not have a direction or a goal to develop higher forms of information. What is inherited and what becomes extinct can be for the better or worse, depending also on the environment and who is evaluating and when. Even in biological evolution, the survival of the fittest does not mean selection of the best, only selection of the one that is the most *adapted* in a certain environment. The term *evolution* in cultural evolution must thus be properly understood. It does not assume any teleological, progressive processes in which certain forms are expected to evolve into higher and more complex forms of human culture—these theories carry racist and colonialist overtones, as explained

4. See Laurence A. Moran, "What Is Evolution?," *Sandwalk Blog*, 9 October 2012, tinyurl.com/SBL03116d; "Evolution is a process that results in heritable changes in a population spread over many generations." István Czachesz, "Evolutionary Theory on the Move: New Perspectives on Evolution in the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Filosofi Unisinos—Unisinos Journal of Philosophy* 19 (2018): 263–71, notes how wide this definition is, including several mechanisms of change (e.g., drift, migration), not only natural selection (that contributes to reproduction fitness).

by Mesoudi.⁵ Nor does cultural evolution mean that the spread of identical memes is comparable to genes.⁶ Below we explain in more detail what cultural evolution is.

Because the nineteenth-century scholars had erroneous, progressive ideas of evolution, the twentieth-century humanists largely rejected and ignored evolutionary ideas of culture. But from the 1990s onward, there has been a rise of new studies on evolution and culture, especially religion.⁷ One big question in the evolutionary science of religion has been if religious thinking and divine concepts evolved as an *adaptive* feature or as a *by-product* in human evolution. As an adaptive feature, religion may have facilitated ingroup morality and cooperation and thus increased the survival of those groups who held such beliefs and their competition among other groups. As a by-product, religion may have been merely an outcome of other evolved human capacities, such as theory of mind, the ability to think of other person's intentions and thoughts.⁸ To answer such questions, scholars seek to analyze hunter-gatherer societies far before the emergence of agriculture, cities, and writing. We are not after such a macro-level explanation of evolution of religion here. Historians of the ancient Near East have the most to offer in analyzing the role of social learning in the kinds of forms and modifications that religious traditions took over time—and these forms are the backdrop of the forms we see today.⁹ Historians not only analyze the ways in which learned information—and

5. Alex Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 37; Mesoudi, "Cultural Evolution: A Review of Theory, Findings and Controversies," *Evolutionary Biology* 43 (2016): 482.

6. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 40th anniv. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), first presented the idea of memes as gene-like replicators: "Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (249). Yet, he too discussed the potential mutation and blending of memes (252–53).

7. See Armin W. Geertz, "Religious Belief, Evolution of," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. James D. Wright, vol. 20, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 384–95.

8. For the debate, see, e. g. Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Marc Hauser, "The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or By-Product?," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14 (2009): 104–9. For a recent attempt to integrate these theories, see Taylor Davis, "The Goldberg Exaptation Model: Integrating Adaptation and By-Product Theories of Religion," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 8 (2017): 687–708.

9. Claire White, *An Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion: Connecting Evolution, Brain, Cognition and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2021), 68–70, clarifies that in explaining religious behavior, evolutionary research is interested in both the

thus culture—changes but also how past human beings modified their environment to support their inherited information and its social learning (niche construction).

Even though cultural evolution is not identical to biological evolution (see below), the basic principles of biological evolution help us to analyze cultural evolution: *variation*, *selection*, and *inheritance*. A well-known example of culturally learned information that is passed on through inheritance is human language. Let us consider verbal forms in English as an example to illustrate some of the basic concepts of cultural evolution:¹⁰

1. *Variation*: In the Oxford English Dictionary, 32,604 verbal entries exist at present. Variation can be documented and quantified. Some verbs share the same semantic range and thus compete for the same cultural niche. New forms may appear at random (e.g., there is an error in transmission) or in a guided way (e.g., new technology requires new words; individuals vary how they pronounce verbs, thus creating the potential for further variation).¹¹ Existing variation can be classified: for example, there are regular verbs (“to walk”—“walked”) and irregular verbs (“to go”—“went”).

2. *Selection* or *differential fitness*: No one individual can master the complete number of verbal forms. For example, many irregular verbal forms have fallen out of use, whereas regular verbs are easier to learn and use; still, frequently used irregular verbs (such as “went”) survive (due to frequency bias). Human cognitive capacity can only use a limited amount of information, and thus some cultural forms are more likely to survive than others.

- ♦ Selection of cultural traits can be studied: for example, prestige bias (imitating high-status individuals), frequency bias (con-

ultimate and the proximate mechanisms. For evolutionary explanations related to religion, see also Czachesz, “Evolutionary Theory.”

10. For this, see Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 30–31.

11. In guided variation, the resulting change is due to individual preferences. If many individuals have a similar preference (e.g., due to cognitive factors such as memorability), then this may result in population-level cultural change. Important to note is that guided variation is not dependent on the number of existing variants to select from (see *Selection* below). Alberto Acerbi and Alex Mesoudi, “If We Are All Cultural Darwinians What’s the Fuss About? Clarifying Recent Disagreements in the Field of Cultural Evolution,” *Biology and Philosophy* 30 (2015): 481–503, speak of the narrow notion of cultural attraction.

formity), and content bias (e.g., memorability) influence which forms are more likely to be copied and transmitted in a certain setting. These traits are not directly related to reproductive fitness as in biological evolution but do often belong to the biologically evolved propensities of *Homo sapiens*.¹² Selection is context-dependent: the trait may be better or worse fitted in the environment to suit the purpose (e.g., certain technical terminology may be selected for a narrow use even though it is not widely used or known, if it effectively carries meanings that otherwise would demand a longer explanation).¹³

- ♦ Sometimes the selected cultural trait is not related to fitness or any directing feature or guided variation: this is called *cultural drift*. Each culturally varying trait has an equal chance of survival, and its selection is purely accidental.¹⁴ If, for instance, some linguistic form is used by only a minority of people, but this group of people

12. For this reason, many scholars instead speak of “biocultural evolution” or “dual inheritance theory”; biological evolution and cultural evolution are not completely distinct processes but influence each other. A famous example is lactose tolerance. When humans (culturally) learned the skill of dairy farming, it became an advantage to still have the ability to digest lactose in adulthood, and thus this trait was passed on genetically; see, e.g., Tim Lewens, “Human Nature, Human Culture: The Case of Cultural Evolution,” *Interface Focus* 7 (2017): 3.

13. Lewens, *Cultural Evolution*, 15–20, distinguishes between those theorists (e.g., Mesoudi) for whom selection is central in the cultural-evolutionary framework and those (e.g., Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005]) who, instead of selection, speak of biased transmission, and concentrate on the interaction and learning within the population (Lewens thus calls this approach “kinetic,” since the analysis at the population level is akin to analyzing how gases are affected by an interaction of particles). Also, Dan Sperber, “An Objection to the Memetic Approach to Culture,” in *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science*, ed. Robert Aunger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163–73, argues that because cultural items are not transmitted as faithfully as genes, natural selection cannot shape their inheritance; only psychological biases can. Such objections can be understood as attempts to acknowledge how cultural evolution differs from biological evolution. For the possibility to combine these views, see Czachesz, “Evolutionary Theory,” 266: “Psychological biases provide constraints that limit the range of possible forms of culture that can survive in the long run; however, there are still possibilities for variation and selection within those limits.” See further below on the difference between biological and cultural evolution.

14. Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 76–79, 81–82.

happens to die, this cultural trait is gone by mere chance. Also, migration (either of people or information via other means) or other population factors influence which cultural forms become more frequent or rare in a population.¹⁵

- ♦ Selection of cultural traits is sometimes connected to increasing the fitness of the organism/group. This may then be called natural selection (e.g., the ability to communicate in an understandable and efficient way may be related to an increased securing of safety).

3. *Inheritance or Transmission*: One usually learns language and verbal forms from one’s parents (vertical inheritance) but also from peers (horizontal inheritance within generation) and from other elders or previous generations (oblique inheritance from unrelated elders). It can be one-to-one transmission (such as face-to-face communication) or one-to-many (such as formal education). Inheritance may also be mixed, for example, if one adopts a cultural trait from several sources and creates an average or adapted form of their variation.

For our purpose, this approach offers heuristic devices for researchers to investigate the different processes of change.¹⁶ Following Mesoudi,¹⁷ we may present in this table the processes of cultural evolution that accumulate change over time:

Process	Description	
VARIATION	Random	Innovations generated at random, cultural mutation
	Guided	Individuals modify acquired information according to individual cognitive biases
SELECTION	Content biases	Adopting cultural traits based on their intrinsic attractiveness

15. For these, see Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 64–76.
16. Lewens, *Cultural Evolution*, 14.
17. Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 57.

INHERITANCE	Model biases	Adopting cultural traits based on characteristics of the model (e.g., their prestige, age, or similarity)
	Frequency biases	Adopting cultural traits based on their frequency (e.g., conformity, copying the most popular trait)
	CULTURAL DRIFT	Random changes in cultural trait frequency due to cultural mutation, random copying and sampling error
	[NATURAL SELECTION]	[Cultural trait spreads due to its effect on survival and reproduction ¹⁸]
	Vertical	Transmission From biological parents
	Horizontal	From unrelated members of the same generation
	Oblique	From unrelated members of the parental generation
	One-to-one	Face-to-face learning from one individual to another
	One-to-many	Few influencing many via mass education or mass media ¹⁹

18. One definition states: “Natural selection means that there is a consistent relationship between a heritable state of a trait, on the one hand, and whether or not the individual carrying it has more or fewer offspring throughout their lifetime that survive and reproduce, on the other hand” (István Czachesz, *Cognitive Science and the New Testament: A New Approach to Early Christian Research* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 25). The picture is complicated by the level at which the selection takes place: at the level of the replicator, the organism (individual), or the group; see the table by Czachesz, *Cognitive Science*, 32. If studied at the level of group selection, then the success is different from the reproductive success of individuals; see further David Sloan Wilson and Edward O. Wilson, “Evolution ‘for the Good of the Group,’” *American Scientist* 96.5 (2008): 1–13. The group that is able to cooperate better, for example, may gain more members and thus outperform other groups.

19. These variables could also be conceptualized differently, for example, as different channels of inheritance: behavioral inheritance (imitating the behavior of others) and symbolic inheritance (interpreting shared symbols); see Czachesz, *Cognitive Science*, 28–29.

Blending	Adopting the average value of a continuous trait from more than one model
Particulate	All-or-nothing transmission of discrete cultural trait

There has been a lot of discussion about the extent to which the mechanism of biological evolution applies or does not apply in cultural evolution. If cultural items are more complex than simple memes, often only partially selected, and possibly modified by individual differences, how can culture be understood in terms of evolution?²⁰ Recent theoretical developments have sought to clarify how cultural evolution is different from biological evolution.²¹ For example, according to Mesoudi, three factors set cultural evolution apart from biological evolution: cultural inheritance is not only vertical (from one’s parents) but also horizontal and oblique, cultural evolution often has guided (not random or blind) variation, and the inherited information is often blended and transformed, not copied in identical form.²² What is selected may even be harmful for biological fitness (such as a norm of extreme asceticism). Yet, the processes of inheritance and selection can be studied. Many things in the process of inheritance are reconstructed and transformed—and some scholars are interested in studying this transformation. Other scholars are more interested in studying the selection process: how something becomes prevalent in a certain population. Alberto Acerbi and Mesoudi argue for the integration of both transformative (narrow attraction) and preservative (selection-like) forces in cultural-evolutionary theory—

20. It is easy to understand that internet memes, symbols, or divine names may be replicated as such, but cultural reproductions of a biblical story or the divine council motif are never identical. Acerbi and Mesoudi, “Clarifying Recent Disagreements,” 481–503, take baby names as an example of something that can be copied and selected faithfully and the Cinderella story as an example of something where certain attractors (such as the pumpkin wagons and the nasty stepmother) are probably preserved in some form but variation also exists, and the story is largely reconstructed rather than copied.

21. Especially some later discovered forms of biological evolution (Neo-Darwinism) do not apply to cultural evolution; see Mesoudi, “Cultural Evolution.”

22. However, this transformation often occurs in ways related to the traits of human cognition that have evolved in biological evolution (e.g., bias for disgust-inducing information related to protection from disease).

they are different aspects.²³ We hope to clarify such debates through our case study.

Yet there remain other theoretical issues to be solved. For example, culture in cultural-evolutionary theories is often confined to information in the brain.²⁴ A recent 4E-approach to cognition as “embodied, embedded, enacted, extended” stresses that information is not stored and preserved by neuro-connections only but that humans are holistically biological entities in constant interaction with their environments and artifacts with which they live.²⁵ A biocultural approach offers a wider perspective to speak of human behavior. Thus, we stress that focus on culture does not mean ignoring human biological evolution; in many aspects, theories seek to understand or even integrate both.

Cultural-evolutionary questions are already being asked in biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. Often cultural evolution is discussed as one aspect of the cognitive science of religion (CSR); even though scholars may combine several theories and perspectives, cultural evolution does not need to be married with the other perspectives. István Czachesz devotes a chapter of his book *Cognitive Science and the New Testament* to explaining what evolution is and how various cognitive theories of religion seek to explain particular processes of selection and inheritance, situating these perspectives in a larger framework of studying various aspects of religion (memory, ritual, experience, and morality)—in his case in early

23. Acerbi and Mesoudi, “Clarifying Recent Disagreements,” 481–503. Talk about forces does not mean the human subjects are incapable of making decisions or are passive agents; cultural-evolutionary framework just studies the end results of these decisions and choices, often at a macrolevel.

24. See, e.g., Richerson and Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone*, 61: “Culture is (mostly) information in brains”; Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 31, notes that cultural information competes for “memory space.”

25. See further Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, and Albert Newen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). It is clear that artifacts do not provide direct access to mental representations behind their production, but from a 4E perspective the phenotypes (the existing cultural artifacts, such as texts) are not simply produced by (past) mental representations alone but need to be understood as extensions of human cognition that can be enacted when new human beings interact with them.

Christianity.²⁶ Similarly, Petri Luomanen runs the project Early Christianity in Cultural Evolution.²⁷

26. Czachesz, *Cognitive Science*, 24–48. Furthermore, religious behavior can be studied at various levels; some are closer to asking why religions emerged in the first place (e.g., the role of god-concepts or ritual behavior in human evolution), while others are more interested in explaining specific patterns of transmission (e.g., which religious concepts/traditions survive better and why). The study of ritual is a good example of this difference. In a recent volume by Risto Uro et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), *evolutionary* questions are raised at least when human ritual behavior is compared to the ritualized behavior of animals and explained as based on similar cognitive mechanisms (see esp. Barry Stephenson, “Ritualization and Ritual Invention,” in Uro et al., *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, 18–37); when ritual is studied as following similar rules as language (Barry Stephenson, “Ritual as Action, Performance, and Practice,” in Uro et al., *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, 49); and when the correlation between ritual behavior and cooperation is investigated (Joseph Bulbulia, “Ritual and Cooperation,” in Uro et al., *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, 95–114). *Cultural-evolutionary* questions are raised at least when cultural transmission and ritual are discussed (István Czachesz, “Ritual and Transmission,” in Uro et al., *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, 115–33). Nevertheless, biological and cultural evolution are not mutually exclusive or alternative processes. The biases that direct which cultural traditions are selected often have to do with which cognitive propensities of *Homo sapiens* were genetically inherited.

27. The members of this project are testing two hypotheses: “(1) Early Christian groups, or some of them, had selective advantage over other religiously oriented groups in the same environment. This advantage provides at least a partial explanation for the rise of Christianity during the first centuries CE. (2) Some variants of early Christian social formation and textual tradition had selective advantage over other corresponding early Christian variants in the same environment. This advantage provides at least a partial explanation for the relative success of these variants within emerging Christian culture” (<https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/early-christianity-in-cultural-evolution/research>). In other words, they are interested in asking if the surviving evidence demonstrates that what was learned in early Christian groups either had a natural selection advantage (that is, socially learned information—such as adherence to better health care practices—made more people survive and pass on their genes; note that this is group-level selection) or a cultural evolution advantage (socially learned information—such as clearly articulated and attractive social identity or new forms of leadership—made these groups better equipped to compete with other groups for new members). Furthermore, they are interested in asking why certain religious literature became more popular than other literature. There was not only one form of Christianity, as we well know. Christianity is not considered as the most evolved form of religion in such a project, nor the only possible end result; cultural evolution merely offers tools and concepts to study transmission of information.

In Hebrew Bible studies, Kurt Noll has advocated a Darwinian approach in his project to critically evaluate when monotheistic ideas and notions of authoritative scriptures could plausibly be seen to be widely disseminated and learned.²⁸ He also makes use of the concept of “cognitively optimal” ideas: some ideas spread more easily than others.²⁹ Brett Maiden’s recent book *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion* applies several cognitive science of religion theories to ancient evidence.³⁰ Cultural evolution is present at least in the way Maiden studies why certain hybrid creatures in iconography become popular, and he opens up room for even more comprehensive statistical analysis of existing data. He raises the important question how cognitively costly forms of religion (forms that were not intuitively easy to learn and remember, such as the Deuteronomic theology of a noniconic God) could survive in cultural transmission, and he suggests important possibilities in light of the modes theory of religion. Furthermore, his explanation of which ritual actions were necessary in order to support and maintain the ancient Near Eastern belief in gods existing as statues (how a humanmade statue was transformed into a divine entity) or why the Day of Atonement ritual became such a central and compelling ritual *could* also be approached from a cultural-evolutionary perspective (e.g., which information was learned and became prevalent through these ritual practices).

Daniel McClellan’s recent work seeks to take into account current scientific notions about how human cognition evolved to process information in terms of agency and a set of ontological categories.³¹ Yet, cultural differences are not denied; McClellan discusses how personhood may be understood differently in different cultural settings. His discussion on the nature of divine concepts moves at the level of both big theories of bio-

28. See, e.g., K. L. Noll, “Did ‘Scripturalization’ Take Place in Second Temple Judaism?” *SJOT* 25 (2011): 201–16; Noll, “Was There Doctrinal Dissemination in Early Yahweh Religion?” *BibInt* 16 (2008): 395–427; Noll, “The Kaleidoscopic Nature of Divine Personality in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 9 (2001): 1–24.

29. This concept is from Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), and Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004).

30. Brett E. Maiden, *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion: New Perspectives on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

31. Daniel O. McClellan, *YHWH’s Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach*, ANEM 29 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022).

logical evolution and more proximate theories of cultural evolution. At the former level, for example, he discusses how predictive coding—the human need to anticipate and understand the environment—explains the emergence of god concepts. At the more proximate level, he discusses how god concepts were anchored in person concepts, were materialized—thus better memorized—and became more frequent, durable, and available, or how the morally interested gods supported group cohesion and the fitness of the social group.

To illustrate the potential of the cultural-evolutionary framework along with some of its concepts, we next take the idea of the divine council as a case study.

11.3. The Divine Council as a Motif in the Ancient Near Eastern Texts

11.3.1. The Motif of the Divine Council

The motif of the divine council can be found basically all over the ancient Near East, from Mesopotamia to the Levant to Egypt. It appears either as a central motif in mythological narratives in which the scene is depicted at length or in the form of shorter references. The longer divine council scenes are typically found in mythological and prophetic texts. Depending on the genre, the divine council appears as an assembly of divine beings in an important epoch of a narrative and, in prophetic texts, as a scene depicted either from an outsider's perspective or experienced by the prophet present in an assembly of the divine council. Both the narrative and the prophetic divine council appears also in the Hebrew Bible.³² Outside of the Hebrew Bible, the most well-known examples of the divine council scenes are from Ugaritic mythology and Mesopotamian narratives of Enuma Elish, Anzu, and Atrahasis.³³ However, the shorter references to

32. For more about attestations of the Divine Council in prophetic texts, see Martti Nissinen, "Prophets and the Divine Council," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Axel Knauf, OBO 186 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 4–19; Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 88, 129, 205, 238–39, 265, 279–81, 285, 342–45; Simon B. Parker, "Council," *DDD*, 204–8.

33. Moreover, while divine council meetings are known in Egypt, in this article

the divine council from Mesopotamia to the Levant to Egypt can be found in a number of mythological, ritual, and prophetic texts. Also, Neo-Assyrian administrative texts bear a number of references to the divine council. These shorter references in various texts are not depicted in such detail as the ones depicted fully in the longer narratives, but they still suggest parts of a specific pattern of the assembly of the divine council, which we take a closer look at in this article.

The divine council has been widely examined in ancient Near Eastern studies. Several scholars touched upon the topic in passing, and a couple of complete volumes on it have appeared in previous decades.³⁴ However, scholars have had varied interests in addressing the topic, and this is why scholarship on the topic looks somewhat scattered. Some investigated the terminology used for the divine council in the primary sources (such as Ug. *bn 'ilm*, *pḥr 'ilm*; or Akk. *puḥur ilāni*), while others focused on the functional structure of the divine council.³⁵ Many studies focused on the divine council especially in the Hebrew Bible and used other ancient Near Eastern texts, such as Ugaritic mythology and Enuma Elish, as comparative materials.³⁶

Although the emic terminology is important, the divine council is also a scholarly, etic term (also “divine assembly,” “assembly of gods,” “sons of gods,” etc.) that does not have only one definition.

we narrow our investigation to the references that in previous scholarship have been more extensively used as comparative material for the biblical passages.

34. Complete volumes on the divine council have been written, for example, by E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004); Ellen White, *Yahweh’s Council: Its Structure and Membership*, FAT 2/65 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Articles or book chapters on the wider context of the subject have also been produced, for example, Herbert Niehr, *Der Höchste Gott: Alttestamentlicher JHWH-Glaube im Kontext syrisch-kanaanäischer Religion des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, BZAW 190 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

35. Mullen, *Divine Council*; Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*; Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*.

36. See for example, Heiser, “Divine Council.” For a more detailed introduction to previous research on the topic of the Divine Council, see, White, *Yahweh’s Council*.

Previous scholarship can—in our view—be roughly divided into two categories, based on scholarly definitions of the divine council: the broad and the narrow. First, scholars with the broad definition may use many definitions for the divine council. For example, Mark S. Smith gives three different definitions for it. According to him, the divine council can refer, firstly, to a divine entourage of a specific deity (*phr 'ilm*³⁷ “assembly of El” or *dr bn 'il* “circle of sons of El”). Secondly, it may be considered a gathering of a group of (two or more) deities.³⁸ Thirdly, the divine council may refer to the entire pantheon. Smith emphasizes that these three meanings can be found not only in Ugaritic mythology but also in the Hebrew Bible. He argues that the original pantheon in these texts was divided into four tiers of deities.³⁹ Earlier, Theodore Mullen used a broad definition of the divine council, but he left the lowest deities of the pantheon out of it.⁴⁰

However, a second, narrower definition, is also used since the divine council has close connections to divination and prophecy and is considered a divine institution for decision-making. For example, Martti Nissinen defines the divine council as a projection of a certain power structure to the realm of the divine, an entity that controls the highest power, which is both hierarchical in nature and a necessity for the well-being of the human realm. According to Nissinen, this power structure is projected onto mythology, rituals, and divination, especially in the prophetic texts of the ancient Near East.⁴¹ Ellen White has similarly defined the divine council as “the government or royal court of the supreme deity.”⁴²

37. Here, *'ilm* must not be considered a plural but a singular with an enclitic suffix.

38. This definition has also been applied earlier by Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 35.

39. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 41–42, 439. About the four tiers of the pantheon, see more also later in this chapter.

40. Mullen, *Divine Council*, 111–19.

41. Consultation with Martti Nissinen, 4 April 2021. Katri Antin, following Nissinen, uses a similar definition as “an assembly that decides on the fate of humankind and the earth, as well as matters concerning the divine realm”; see Katri Antin, “Sages in the Divine Council: Transmitting Divine Knowledge in Sirach 24, 1 Enoch 14–16, Daniel 7, and in Two Hodayot Psalms (1QH^a 12:6–13:6; 20:7–22:42),” in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mika Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko, PFES 108 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015), 182–209.

42. White, *Yahweh's Council*, 1.

What we propose in this study is a definition that integrates previously suggested definitions in one scheme itemizing the divine council scenes by a specific literary pattern that recurs from an ancient Near Eastern literary corpus to another. This starting point serves us in demonstrating the variation and the malleability of this motif, which is important in cultural evolution.

11.3.2. Literary Pattern in the Divine Council Scenes

For this enterprise, we analyzed an abundance of literary scenes with emic terms (such as *bn 'ilm*, *phr 'ilm*, *puḥur ilāni*, etc.) that have been connected to the divine council in previous scholarship. Based on our investigation, most of these scenes follow a recurring literary pattern.⁴³

1. The divine council gathers around the supreme deity.
2. A single issue is raised.
3. A volunteer is sought.
4. Divine agency is delivered.

The literary pattern is structured so that it enables great variation in terms of its internal contents. The personal names and other contextual details between various divine council scenes may differ considerably from each other, but the literary pattern itself remains static, appearing strikingly similar from one era, culture, and textual scene to another. In our view, the literary pattern consists of four parts, all of which are important for the pattern, but internal variation is important in making the divine council scene fit into new contexts.

First, the divine council is led by the *supreme deity* of the pantheon. The rest of the council members gather around him. The name of the

43. More importantly, we argue that this literary pattern can also be considered a literary embodiment of a cognitive schema of an assembly, which may have made the divine council scenes more memorable; see further below. See also Martti Nissinen, "Wisdom as Mediatrix in Sirach 24: Ben Sira, Love Lyrics, and Prophecy," in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. Mikko Luukko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, StOr 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009), 377–90. Nissinen identified a pattern of delivery of divine knowledge from the divine council to the king via a mediatrix goddess and the prophet, and Antin follows this pattern. However, our definition of the literary pattern in the divine council scenes differs from the one used by Nissinen and Antin.

supreme deity varies from one cultural environment to another and sometimes even within a single culture, but his position as the head of the divine council is necessary for the institution.⁴⁴ Second, the assembly of the divine council has been *gathered* in order to discuss and decide about a *single issue*, which threatens the worldly balance and well-being and needs to be solved. Usually, the divine council is summoned by the supreme deity but sometimes by another prominent deity of the pantheon; in many cases the character of the summoner is not explicit. Sometimes the divine council is gathered by chance, in the middle of a divine feast, for example, and the narrative leads to a situation in which an issue is raised and must be discussed. Most importantly, the divine council is formed and the issue raised. Third, when the decision about what to do about the issue at hand is made, there is a call for a *volunteer* among those present in the assembly to take agency. Sometimes the volunteer is a usual suspect, such as a prominent divine warrior of the pantheon or a goddess or a prophet who delivers messages to human beings, but sometimes no volunteer emerges. Fourth, *divine agency is delivered* to a specific divine agent, who is thus authorized to act according to the divine council's decision. In some scenes, the agency is clearly given by the supreme deity, whereas in others it is rather arbitrarily taken by a prominent deity. In these scenes it obviously does not matter whether the authority is given or taken. The divine authorization to act is gained either way, if the divine council does not oppose it at the end. Sometimes agency remains with the supreme deity if no volunteer can be found. However, divine agency is important as it has been directly authorized by the divine council and represents the will of the god(s).

We limit our investigation to those literary scenes in which this literary pattern is visible. In previous scholarship, the definitions of the divine council usually fulfilled the first part of our definition as to what

44. For example, in Ugaritic texts one can find some like the Ugaritic mythology in which *ʾIlu* (El) is clearly the supreme deity, and texts where it seems that *Ba ʾlu* (Baal) is the head of the divine council. Also, in the Hebrew Bible, it is not always clear whether the divine council is led by YHWH or by El Elyon as another deity, even though in some texts (like Deut 32: 8–9) it is certain that El and YHWH must be considered two separate deities. In this study, we do not take sides in the debate on the names of the supreme deities. Rather, we focus on the position of the supreme deity in the divine council, which is necessary for the institution irrespective of the deity's name.

is sufficient to form a divine council scene. We agree that those definitions indeed approach the same phenomenon of the divine council, but being wider than ours, they would expand the pool of textual material too much for our comparative approach. Via our narrow definition, these literary scenes become comparable. The literary pattern itself is the common denominator for all these scenes, whereas the contents of the scenes are dependent upon the context. Yet, we recognize that the literary pattern around the divine council may indicate deeper structures than exemplified by the pattern. In other words, the divine council scene is not itself a literary motif to be transmitted, but it functions rather as a means to communicate various ideas about the divine world and divine-human interaction.

11.3.3. Examples of Divine Council Scenes

We now move to presenting some examples of how the literary divine council pattern appears in the ancient Near Eastern texts. We exclude shorter references to the divine council with elements from only one or two of the parts of the pattern. Sometimes the references are relatively brief, yet implicit references to the divine council pattern can be recognized. For example, in Ezek 22:30, as the speaker for YHWH the prophet says: "And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it, but I found no one." This verse includes the issue to be solved and the need for divine agency, but missing are YHWH as the supreme deity and the volunteer to take that divine agency.

There are considerable differences between different textual genres in the divine council scenes. For example, in most of the divine council scenes in narrative texts, the assembly's decision is short and simple, whereas the verbal debate between different divine council members preceding the decision is extended. Mutually, in some prophetic texts (for instance, in Zech 3), the council decision is as long as the prophecy itself, and the other parts of the divine council pattern remain rather dim. Moreover, there is noticeable intercultural variation in the emic terminology used for the divine council between different languages, and there is also intracultural variation within different texts from the same cultural environment and even within a single text. Sometimes variation also appears in the voice of the verb, as some divine council scenes appear in active form and some in passive.

In many scenes, the issue discussed in the divine council concerns a threatening monster that needs to be killed. For instance, in the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, gods gather in the divine council around the supreme deity Anu in order to decide what to do with the monster Tiamat (ii.129–138). In this scene, Anu remains a passive figure and the other deities make suggestions about the champion to face the monster. Finally, Marduk is chosen from among the deities. A similar narrative structure is repeated in the Anzu; there the question is who would conquer the monster Anzu in the same way as Tiamat in the *Enuma Elish*.⁴⁵

Ugaritic mythology has two clear attestations of the divine council (Ug. *phr m'd*, *phr 'ilm*). They appear in the Baal Cycle (*KTU* 1.2 i.14–20) and in the Kirta epic (*KTU* 1.16 v.9–28). Ugaritic divine councils gather around the supreme god El (*'Ilu*), who is clearly the head of the council, even though the other deities seem to have a rather wide range of freedom to act in the council meeting.⁴⁶ In the Baal Cycle, the divine council scene belongs to the narrative (*KTU* 1.1–1.2) in which Yam, the god of the sea, challenges the storm-god Baal to battle. In this scene, the deities of the divine council seem to be shocked when Yam's messengers deliver their message—except for Baal, who is enraged by the messengers' arrogant words. El has been afraid of Baal's growing power among the gods of Ugarit and has plotted against him with Yam and readily delivers Baal into the hands of Yam. Thus, in this narrative, the supreme god gives his verdict out of fear; this is a unique feature that does not appear elsewhere in the ancient Near Eastern narratives. As the scene continues, Baal accepts Yam's challenge. Finally, with the help of the artisan god Kothar-wa-Khasis, Baal smites Yam, making this narrative the closest parallel to the divine council scene of *Enuma Elish*. In the Baal Cycle, Yam can be considered a similar figure to Mesopotamian Anzu or Tiamat in the *Enuma Elish*, a cosmic monster who has to be slain.⁴⁷

45. Parker, "Council סוד," 205.

46. What is noticeable in these texts is that the divine council may appear around another prominent deity of the pantheon, not only El, who is clearly the highest god in Ugarit mythological texts and may deliver the kingship to other gods as well. For example, an Ugaritic sacrificial text *KTU* 1.39:7 mentions a council of Baal (*phr b 'l*).

47. For more about the ancient Near Eastern combat myth, see Joanna Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth: North West Semitic Political Mythology in the Hebrew Bible*, AOAT 457 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018).

In the Ugaritic epic of Kirta, the divine council gathers around El in order to decide what to do with King Kirta, who suffers from a deadly illness (*KTU* 1.16 v.9–28). The divine council in this scene is organized by El, but Baal acts as the initiator to summon the meeting. Still, when El repeatedly asks who among the deities of the divine council would act and cure Kirta, no one volunteers. Finally, when no volunteers appear, El decides to act himself. Out of clay he molds a female healer figure, Šataqat, who then goes to Kirta and removes the disease, and the epic proceeds. Here, the pattern appears to be that while an issue is being discussed in the divine council and none of the deities volunteers, finally one of the council members takes the initiative.

In the Hebrew Bible, the divine council appears as a whole in several texts within the aforementioned pattern: Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Ps 82; Isa 6; Dan 7; Sir 24; see also 1 En. 14–16. However, references to single parts of the divine council pattern can also be found, for example, in Deut 32:8–9; these seem to be important for an understanding of the scholarly debate on the rise of monotheism in the biblical texts. Moreover, some Dead Sea Scrolls bear references to the divine council; see, for example, two Hodayot Psalms (1QH^a XII, 6–XIII, 6; XX, 7–XXII, 42).⁴⁸

To take some examples, a divine council scene appears twice in the book of Job (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6). In these passages, divine beings are gathered in a council meeting around YHWH (יְיָ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב) (עַל־יְהוָה), who then asks Satan: “Have you considered my servant Job?”⁴⁹ The debate between YHWH and Satan over Job ends with the decree of YHWH that Satan may put Job’s true faith to a test. Compared to the other ancient Near Eastern texts, the person Job appears as the issue of discussion, and YHWH as the supreme god gives Satan the divine agency, delivering Job into his hands to be tested.

The Hebrew Bible has two complete divine council scenes in prophetic texts (Isa 6:8–13; 1 Kgs 22:19–23). A special trait in these scenes is that the prophet is described as being present in the divine council, either in person or at least as an outside spectator, eyewitnessing the assembly. In Isa 6:8–13, the prophet is present in the assembly and describes his experience about the divine council, including YHWH sitting on a throne

48. On the continuation of prophecy and forms of divination in the Hodayot, see Katri Antin, “Transmission of Divine Knowledge in the Sapiential Thanksgiving Psalms from Qumran” (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2019).

49. Translations of biblical texts follow NSRV.

surrounded by seraphs. The question in the assembly concerns who would deliver the word of God to the people of Israel. The prophet describes how a seraph purifies his “unclean lips” with a live coal, after which he is ready to be given divine agency and act as the deliverer of the word of God.⁵⁰

The story of the prophet Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19–23) is an example of a divine council scene in which the prophet tells about his vision from a spectator’s point of view. Unlike in Isa 6, here the prophet reveals that the divine agency was not delivered to Ahab’s prophets but to a volunteering lying spirit (22:22), who went into their ears with the authorization of God. This scene runs like a detective story, and Micaiah reveals the true nature—namely, falsehood—of Ahab’s prophets.

Daniel 7:9–14 includes a biblical version of the divine council scene that very much resembles the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, Anzu, and Atrahasis, as well as the Ugaritic divine council scene from the Baal Cycle. This scene is presented as Daniel’s vision as he watches the unfolding events from the outside, in the same way as the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22. Daniel describes how thrones are set for the council members, justice is meted out, and the books are opened. The divine council is organized by the Ancient of Days (עתיק יומין), the supreme deity, who has taken his throne of flames with wheels of burning fire. Daniel also describes how horns were speaking arrogant words, how the beast was killed and its body destroyed, as well as how other beasts’ power was taken from them. Finally, Daniel sees coming with the clouds of heaven the Son of Man (בר אנש), to whom all dominion is given. In this scene, we see the divine council pattern in which the variables appear in a mixed order, fitting with the enigmatic prophetic scene. The beast clearly represents the problematic issue dealt with in the divine council assembly in the same way as Tiamat in the *Enuma Elish*. However, it is unclear whether the beast is slain by the Son of Man, who is given the divine agency and the everlasting dominion at the end of the scene. The description of the Ancient of Days resembles that of El in the Ugaritic texts. Moreover, the arrogant words of the horn resemble those of Yam’s messengers in the divine council scene in the Baal Cycle. The character of the Son of Man is close to the

50. The divine justification to act as a prophet is implicitly referred to in a number of texts from other ancient Levantine sources, such as the two Mari Letters to King Zimri-Lim (ARM 26.208) from the Old Babylonian period, and the Balaam inscription from Deir ‘Alla (ca. 700 BCE), but the divine council pattern is not complete in them. For more about these texts, see Nissinen, “Prophets and the Divine Council.”

Ugaritic storm-god Baal, whose epithet The Rider of the Clouds depicts him as a divine warrior.

The passage in Deut 32:8–9 is often referred to as a divine council scene.⁵¹ In this poem, the Most High (עליון) divides humankind according to the number of their gods. This scene reflects some of the variables of the divine council pattern, but the scene itself is incomplete. Gods as members of the divine council are clearly present in this scene, gathering around the supreme god (עליון).⁵² The scene may imply that the issue of the council assembly involves the boundaries of the peoples, and the divine agency over the people of Israel is given to YHWH. This scene has often been considered as important for the debate on the rise of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible, which we will discuss in the following section.

11.3.4. The Divine Council in Light of Cultural Evolution

After the examples of the divine council pattern in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and the Hebrew Bible above, we proceed by asking how cultural-evolutionary questions are relevant for the investigation of the divine council. The divine council theme has been important in two scholarly discussions, one concerning influence and the other concerning the rise of monotheism. We suggest that the cultural-evolutionary perspective may contribute to both discussions.

11.3.4.1. *Questions of Influence and Inheritance*

The appearance of the divine council institution in many different textual corpora all around the ancient Near East has raised the question if the biblical authors were influenced by other ancient Near Eastern sources, either directly or indirectly. According to the present paradigm, the biblical texts did not appear in a vacuum isolated from the surrounding cultures, and influences went back and forth in multiple directions. Limiting the research on the evolution of the divine council only to the biblical texts

51. See, for example, Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*; White, *Yahweh's Council*; Jonathan Ben-Dov, "The Resurrection of the Divine Assembly and the Divine Title El in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Submerged Literature in Ancient Greek Culture, Beyond Greece: The Comparative Perspective*, ed. Andrea Ercolani and Manuela Giordano (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 9–31.

52. Ben-Dov, "Resurrection of the Divine Assembly."

is both artificial and misdirecting.⁵³ Instead, we must consider the entire ancient Near East as a cultural sphere, as connections between the kingdoms and empires within it are widely attested.

Using the terminology of cultural evolution helps us to avoid the trap of imposing a retrospective point of view that considers phenomena appearing in the biblical material as something unique and distinct from phenomena appearing outside them. From the cultural-evolutionary perspective, variation of a cultural phenomenon—in this case, ideas about the divine council—is a starting point. Rather than searching for actual direct flows of inheritance, cultural evolution concentrates on mechanisms that underpin the survival and reproduction of a certain idea within a certain cultural sphere.

Direct flows of inheritance, such as cultural copying and mutations, are safer to study at a microlevel when textual variants or translations exist for the same text. Similar cultural-evolutionary questions can be asked in these cases. For example, what is it that made ideas persist from one variant to another? In some cases, the answer may be that at a certain point the text has reached such an authoritative or sacred status that changes in its variants—either additions or omissions—happened less often.⁵⁴ In cultural-evolutionary terms, we can talk about a *prestige bias* (although it normally refers to the prestige of a person and not of a text). In these cases, the transmission process of the cultural idea has by nature been preservative rather than renovating.⁵⁵ However, in the early stages of biblical texts and traditions, the authority of texts was different, and the prestige bias explains the endurance of some theological anomalies only in the later periods of time.

A text may seem to be especially prone to getting changed at the point of being translated from one language to another. The process of transla-

53. If the investigation were to concern a phenomenon limited only to the biblical texts, narrowing down research material to those texts would make sense also from the cultural evolution viewpoint, but this obviously does not apply to the research on the divine council.

54. For decades it was the state-of-the-art view in textual historical research of the Hebrew Bible that the biblical texts were always so sacred and precious that, on purpose, no omissions at all happened. Only in the more recent scholarship has this view been abandoned. For this discussion, see especially Juha Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible*, FRLANT 251 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

55. Acerbi and Mesoudi, "Clarifying Recent Disagreements."

tion includes a process of *recontextualization* into a new cultural system, and thus also a process of *reconceptualization* is needed. For example, Septuagint translations emerged in the early Jewish circles in the Hellenistic period. In those circles, certain YHWH-alone and only-YHWH conceptualizations of Israel's divinity were prominent. Thus, some books—or some parts of them—in the Septuagint were translated by scribes who considered certain references to the divine council as problematic in the light of theological ideals of their own time. This can be seen, for instance, in Job 1:6, where the Masoretic Text refers to the divine council as בני האלהים, which can be understood as “the sons of gods” or “gods.” The Greek text of the Septuagint uses the term οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ “the angels of God,” which smoothly passes over the problem of a possibly deviating conceptualization of divinity by reconceptualizing the divine beings, clarifying that they must be angels and not deities. However, cultural variation can be seen when comparing this translation to Gen 6:2, where most likely another Septuagint translator has translated the same Hebrew expression, בני האלהים, as οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, which literally means “sons of God.”⁵⁶

In most of the cases, direct flows of influence between parallel ideas in two texts cannot be verified from the existing sources. As the variation in the divine council pattern is extensive, one may rightfully ask if it is the same constellation of ideas at all or if ideas of divine interaction and relations are used in different sources independently from each other—that is, people develop the same idea without learning it from each other. If divine beings are conceptualized as person-like characters, they naturally convene to discuss, solve problems, intervene with each other's business—as humans do. In cultural-evolutionary terms, the question is, can the similarities be explained by independent evolution, rather than common descent. Since the idea of the divine council is easily reinvented, people may independently modify their ideas of gods (guided variation) in similar ways, thus resulting in a pattern that looks like the same idea. Alternatively, common descent is more likely when the idea is less intuitive but still occurs in much the same form. The variation may then be explained by *blended inheritance*, such that the sources have been impacted by earlier ideas but these ideas are also modified, or blended, along the way. In light of contemporary scholarship, common descent seems to us more likely.

56. For more about the term “sons of gods,” see Simon B. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” *DDD*, 794–800.

Above we argued that a sufficiently identifiable pattern legitimates speaking of the idea of the divine council, which has been both a prominent and important part of conceptualization of the divine world all around the ancient Near East.

The differences in details of the divine council scenes speak to the malleability of the idea (blended inheritance): it is never inherited and transmitted in fixed forms and with identical content from one narrative constellation to another, and, thus, it is not spread in meme-like fashion. We are interested in explaining precisely this: Why is the idea persistent? We think that the answer can be found in its cultural variation.

11.3.4.2. *The Question of the Rise of Monotheism*

The second scholarly discussion relevant to cultural evolution is the debate surrounding monotheism and the Hebrew Bible. As the divine council implicitly includes a conceptualization of multiple divine beings in the texts of the Hebrew Bible, how and when was the idea of only one God created? Views on this have varied considerably during the last decades. Recent scholarship has shifted away from the dichotomizing distinctions that dominated the field in earlier scholarship. Such distinctions as a fixed line between the Bible and the other cultures of the ancient Near East, or the bipolarity of monotheism and polytheism, have gradually disappeared. Furthermore, the discussion about a progression from polytheism to monotheism, which was common in earlier scholarship, has faded away to a large extent.⁵⁷ However, there is still a division of opinions about the nature of the history of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible.

Smith's book *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* can be considered an important reference point, as since its publication it has had an effect on almost all studies of the divine council. Based on comparative research of Ugaritic mythology and the Hebrew Bible, with shorter references to the other ancient Near Eastern texts, Smith suggests that the ancient Canaanite pantheon was constructed of four tiers of deities. He argues that in the top first tier, the divine couple of El and Asherah rule over the deities in the lower tiers. The second tier consists of princes such as Baal, Yam, and Mot, and their colleagues, such as Anat, Astarte, Reseph, and others. The third tier is reserved for lower deities, such as the artisan god

57. Pongratz-Leisten, "New Agenda."

Kothar-wa-Khasis, who help the deities in the upper tiers. Finally, the fourth and lowest tier consists of the divine messengers, who are often, but not always, known by name. According to Smith, these divine tiers are also the basis of different conceptualizations of the divine council in which El as the supreme deity usually appears as the leader. Smith argues that vestiges of similar structures of a pantheon can be found in the Hebrew Bible: the pantheon evolved into different conceptualizations of divinity in later periods of time.⁵⁸ A number of scholars have accepted Smith's four-tier model of the Canaanite pantheon and its connection to the rise of monotheism.⁵⁹

Smith's view of the Israelite divine council's history includes a process in which YHWH, who was originally a deity in the pantheon's second tier, was assimilated to El, who was the supreme deity of the pantheon in a similar way as in the Ugaritic texts. Smith follows the paradigm according to which this assimilation took place somewhere around the eighth century BCE, when Asherah was considered YHWH's consort and not only El's.⁶⁰ YHWH's assimilation to El is rather clear in most parts of the Hebrew Bible. This also means a collapse of the second and the third tier in the Israelite pantheon. The deities in the fourth tier were not considered proper deities anymore but rather lower divine beings that retained their messenger role as angels, as is attested, for instance, in Job 1:6 (see above). Nevertheless, YHWH and El can be found as separate deities in a couple of texts. For example, in Deut 32:8–9, the supreme god Elyon (עליון) distributes the nations of the earth among different deities and YHWH gains the nation of Israel for himself.

58. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*; Smith, "God in Translation: Cross-Cultural Recognition of Divinity in Ancient Israel," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 241–70. The model of a four-tier Canaanite pantheon was first introduced in Smith, "Divine Travel as a Token of Divine Rank," *UF* 16 (1984): 359. A similar four-tier hierarchy in the Canaanite pantheon was also suggested by Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*. However, Handy uses the terminology of bureaucracy, whereas Smith operates with terms of a "divine family."

59. See, for example, White, *Yahweh's Council*; McClellan, "Deity and Divine Agency."

60. 1 Kgs 22:19 and Isa 6 also seem to reflect this view. The *terminus ante quem* for the assimilation of El to YHWH is based on the inscriptions from Kuntilet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom.

Many scholars view Ps 82, which strongly follows the divine council pattern introduced above, as the proclamation of biblical monotheism in a miniature way, as the supreme god takes the divine agency for himself for good and condemns other gods to become mortals. Previous scholarship is divided on the question whether the supreme god in this scene is YHWH or El, as the Hebrew text does not mention the name YHWH.⁶¹ Some scholars, like Juha Pakkala, have emphasized that the transition from more polytheistic theological views to a stricter cultic structure around YHWH took place as a radical shift between the sixth and the fourth centuries BCE, after the destruction of the Solomonic temple of Jerusalem and either during or after the Babylonian exile, which can be seen in certain biblical texts, such as the Deuteronomistic History.⁶² Kurt Noll categorically denies any continuation of mono-Yahwistic conceptualizations of divinity before the Hellenistic era. He emphasizes that the so-called ancient Israelite religion was structured around a patron deity—possibly called YHWH—who was similar to all the other patron deities of Iron Age Syro-Palestine, interacting with other deities of the local pantheon. Noll also emphasizes that the Yahwistic theology of the Hellenistic era was not a religion of the illiterate masses but rather a theological ideal of a small elite.⁶³ Other scholars like Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Peter Machinist have suggested that the appearance of mono-Yahwistic views in biblical texts happened gradually during the first millennium BCE. They also highlight the vague distinction between different conceptualizations of divinity that do not simply fall into such categories as polytheism and monotheism.⁶⁴

The cultural-evolutionary approach in this debate requires that we set aside assumptions about major theological shifts on the macrolevel—at least before the late Second Temple period when we have evidence of large-scale copying of the same biblical texts—and focus on the wide inner

61. For example, Heiser, “Divine Council,” argues that the supreme god must clearly be considered to be YHWH, whereas Peter Machinist, “How Gods Die, Biblically and Otherwise: A Problem of Cosmic Restructuring,” in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 189–240, argues that he was conceptualized as El.

62. See, for example, Juha Pakkala, “The Origins of Yahwism from the Perspective of Deuteronomism,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, BZAW 484 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 267–81.

63. Noll, “Was There Doctrinal Dissemination?”

64. Pongratz-Leisten, “New Agenda.”

variation of conceptualizations of divinity within the Hebrew Bible. Each conceptualization of divinity has to be interpreted in its own textual context (and possible textual history), not assuming, as a result of compiling these texts, that there existed one homogenous and harmonious conception of God. The cultural-evolutionary approach may also ask *why* this theological motif has proved to be so enduring in such an extensive amount of textual scenes—this may then reveal something specific about the cultural context in which it appears. The divine council motif never disappeared from the biblical texts despite their prominent theological tendencies. Vice versa, various divine council scenes appear alongside the YHWH-alone conceptualizations of divinity in biblical texts. Thus, we assume that the divine council was a necessary institution in various theological systems in the ancient Near East with different conceptualizations of divinity—both within the Hebrew Bible and in numerous extrabiblical texts. In the following section, we introduce some necessary evolutionary functions that the divine council served.

11.3.4.3. *The Divine Council's Reconceptualization in Qumran*

Conceptualizations of the divine council also varied significantly among the early Jewish circles during the Hellenistic Period. While the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text reflect processes of reconceptualizing the lower tiers of deities as something else than actual gods, Qumranic versions of these texts utilized a multiplicity of gods. Jonathan Ben-Dov argues that the divine council experienced a resurrection in the Qumran community's theological thinking, whereas the mainstream of early Jewish theology embraced conceptualizations of divinity around YHWH as the only true God.⁶⁵ He bases his argument on an older readings of Deut 32:8, 43 as attested in 4QDeut^j 34 (PAM 43.054) and 4QDeut^q 5 II (PAM 42.164). The Masoretic Text of Deut 32:8 refers to the “sons of Israel” (בני ישראל), but the arguably older reading in the Qumranic versions refers to the “sons of gods” (בני האלוהים). In Deut 32:43, the Masoretic texts lack the phrase “bow down to him all you gods” (והשתחוּ לוֹ בָּל אֱלֹהִים), which is preserved in the LXX (καὶ προσκυνήσάτωσαν αὐτῷ υἱοὶ θεοῦ). According to Ben-Dov, embracing the older Levantine conceptualization of divinity was a common practice in the Qumranic theological worldview. Ben-Dov refers

65. Ben-Dov, “Resurrection of the Divine Assembly.”

to the War Scroll, Hodayot, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, and Peshar of Melchizedek, all of which employ the language of “holy ones” or “sons of the heaven,” and even “gods” (אלים).⁶⁶ Besides these, we can find many more cases in the scrolls: for example, the Qumran Blessings Scroll, even though fragmentary, envisions the hosts around the divine throne, including “mighty (ones of) gods in power” (גבורי אלים בכוֹחַ; 4Q286 [4QBer^a] 2 2), as praising God, as well as “the council of gods”:

the c]ouncil of *elim* of purification (וְסוּדָר אֱלִי טוֹהָר) with all those who have eternal knowledge, to prai[se] and to bles[s] Your glorious name in all [ever]la[sting ages]. Amen. Amen. (4Q286 7 I, 6–7)⁶⁷

The role of the supreme God (often אֵל in sectarian literature) was important for the Qumran community because of his position as the chief of the divine council, but, as Ben-Dov argues, the other divine beings were “suitable for their demonology and for their theology in general,” needed for the “multi-vocal heavenly choir,” and the supreme God’s power could “only be manifested by way of interacting with the other divine beings surrounding Him.”⁶⁸ However, Ben-Dov does not provide more specific reasons about *what* of the idea made it appealing to the Qumran authors, *why* it was suitable for their demonology, or *why* the divine beings were needed in the heavenly praise or for manifesting the divine greatness.

Clearly those in the Qumran movement envisioned their earthly community to be in communion with the heavenly congregation, and this was important both for fulfilling the law (aligning their worship according to the divinely ordained cosmic time) and for receiving the help of the heavenly hosts during times of crisis (such as the expected war or demonic attacks). This provides one explanation for their reconceptualization of the divine council: being part of a wider divine sphere, humans were entrusted with divine secrets. The human-divine distinction was blurred at least momentarily, and the movement’s members became important extensions

66. E.g., 1QM XII, 1–5; 1QH^a XI, 19–23 (also: XV, 28; XVIII, 8); 4Q400 (4QShirShabb^a) 1 I, 4–5; 11Q13 II, 9–10. Ben-Dov, “Resurrection of the Divine Assembly,” 17, 22–23, argues that these conceptions continued through the (Syriac) Aramaic literature and reemerged in the Hebrew literature.

67. Translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls follow Emanuel Tov, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library: Texts and Images* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

68. Ben-Dov, “Resurrection of the Divine Assembly,” 20, 23–24.

of divine agency. The divine council in the Qumran corpus thus underlines the transcendence of the Supreme God but, at the same time, gives access to humans to join it. God is distinct from gods, as in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: “[And when he acts, (even) the god-like ones cannot comprehend that which He purposes]” (4Q402 [4QShirShabb^c] 4 14–15).⁶⁹ But at the same time, humans may join the forum of gods of knowledge or lead the heavenly chorus: “For the Instructor ... Praise the God of the exalted heights, O you exalted ones among all the gods of knowledge” (4Q403 [4QShirShabb^d] 1 I, 30–31).⁷⁰ One may also ask if the monotheistic drive withdrew God too far and above the human sphere, such that new ways (especially rituals) were developed in order to feel the divine presence and rebuild trust in the magnificent God with the agency to act. In cultural-evolutionary terms, the divine council, while an ancient and influential idea, found a fresh new niche.

11.3.4.4. *Evolutionary Functions Explaining the Endurance of the Divine Council*

In more general terms, the divine council as a theological-cultural institution was based on several cognitive foundations that served its evolutionary survival. We may identify at least the following *content biases*. First, the divine council is based on an *anthropomorphic conceptualization of divinity*, which can be found in almost all religions all around the world.⁷¹ Envisioning divine beings as interacting with each other in a similar way as humans makes the abstract idea of divinity much easier to process. In the terms of Robert McCauley, this may be considered a *maturationally natural* idea—something that emerges easily with minimal instruction.⁷²

69. Reconstructed on the basis of the parallel in MasShirShabb I, 1–6.

70. Antin, “Transmission of Divine Knowledge.”

71. Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?*, Cognitive Science of Religion Series (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004).

72. Robert N. McCauley, “Maturationally Natural Cognition, Radically Counter-Intuitive Science, and the Theory-Ladenness of Perception,” *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 46 (2015): 183–99; White, *Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*, 49–52. Friedhelm Hartenstein, “God, Gods, and Humankind (Worldview),” in *Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Samuel E. Balentine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 145–59, offers a working definition of a god, initially stating: “Gods are entities conceptualized as persons and therefore

The human brain is also prone to solving social problems and to being interested in them.⁷³ The idea that the gods would act socially—like humans—by gathering in the divine council has several features that make it cognitively attractive: it shows how information is communicated, how decisions are made, and who gets the divine agency to act, all the while keeping track of alliances and deceptions, and so on.⁷⁴

Second, and related to the first point, the divine council scenes may be based on a certain *cognitive schema*⁷⁵—a mental framework of organizing and synthesizing information for certain situations—of humans making decisions together. More specifically in this case, this meant elite courts making decisions, which is woven into the fabric of the divine council scenes' literary pattern. This possibility suggests that the idea was not only present as a literary (public and material) representation but may also have existed in oral transmission (although, if created in elite circles, then among the elites). This cognitive schema was malleable enough to enable the contextual variation in the divine council scenes, which was of utmost importance for the endurance of the divine council overall.

imagined most notably in a human-like (anthropomorphic) form. They are locatable since they have bodies, and they are addressable since they have names. Gods are characterized by their superhuman size, splendor, power, and opacity" (148). However, he also notes that this personal perception is not the only one: "Beside and below the circumscribed individual deities, there is a much broader field of divine beings like certain cosmic or socially significant phenomena (e.g. celestial bodies, mountains, justice and righteousness, luck). The personified abstracta are thought to be very effective powers for human lives. Material objects, too, could be incorporated in the sphere of the divine (primarily when they are ritually used)" (149). See also Jutta Jokiranta, Ville Mäkipelto, and Miika Tucker, "Cognitive Science Meets Septuagint Studies: Seeking Clarity and Complexity to the Case of Anthropomorphism," in this volume.

73. Alex Mesoudi, Andrew Whiten, and Robin Dunbar, "A Bias for Social Information in Human Cultural Transmission," *British Journal of Psychology* 97 (2006): 405–23.

74. Mesoudi, *Cultural Evolution*, 142–44.

75. The concept of a schema is originally based on the work of Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child* (London: Routledge, 2001); Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967). The consensus schema's definition is still missing in the field of cognitive psychology, but talking about a mental framework for organizing and synthesizing information for certain kind of situations based on various mental representation of subjects and objects involved may come close.

Jean Piaget, who has explained childhood-age learning via certain cognitive schemas, argued that learning happens either through *assimilation* or *accommodation* as a new piece of information needs to be processed. He maintained that the contents of an old schema are naturally reluctant to change, and the new information needs specific support in order to get *accommodated*. Otherwise, the new information is simply *assimilated* into the old information of the schema. For example, if a child only has a conceptualization of a cat and has never seen another animal, they will certainly *assimilate* a rabbit into the category of a cat if *accommodation* of another category (i.e., a rabbit) is not supported by their parents or other more mature members of the community. Moreover, schemata tend to become stronger in older age. People are keen to hold on to their conceptualizations according to their cognitive schemata instead of changing their attitudes. They also tend to distort some new information in order to make it fit into existing schemata.⁷⁶

If our hypothesis about the cognitive schema underpinning conceptualization of the divine council is correct, we may consider that such a schema played a major role in its evolutionary endurance. Reconceptualization took place within the schema as new conceptualizations of divinity were assimilated so that they would fit into the older categorizations. For example, new conceptualizations of angels were assimilated to the divine council schema in which they only replaced the older deities of lower levels of the pantheon. When the schema received several literary presentations, its transmission was further enhanced. Moreover, the cognitive schema underpinning the literary divine council could have provided room even for *rapid changes*. A creative individual with the cognitive schema of the divine council in mind would have been able to produce a new divine council scene relatively easily.

Third, the divine council resonates with the cognitive foundation of *promiscuous teleology*, the tendency of human cognition to process events in the surrounding environment as something that has a purpose.⁷⁷ Events that otherwise remain unintelligible or feel unfair may be found reasonable when conceptualizing them as the decisions and deeds of gods.

Fourth, and related to the third point, the divine council may have served as a tool for *immanent-justice reasoning* or *proportionality bias*—the

76. Piaget, *Language and Thought of the Child*, 81–89.

77. Deborah Kelemen and Evelyn Rosset, “The Human Function Compunction: Teleological Explanation in Adults,” *Cognition* 111 (2009): 138–43.

idea that good things happen to the good and, conversely, those who do bad will finally get their punishment.⁷⁸ Solidified again in the case of those at Qumran, they obviously elaborated on this by considering themselves as an extension of the divine community—as the righteous and chosen people who were strictly distinguished from corrupt ones. However, even though the Qumran community is a prime example of this, as the moral guarding function is found so explicitly related to its conceptualization of the divine council, it is by no means the only one. As the divine council was a key factor in conceptualization of divinity in so many ancient Near Eastern cultures, it is likely that it served for moral guarding purposes in them also more at a more general level.⁷⁹

Fifth, repeating the divine council scenes—with malleable variations—following the same literary pattern may have served some ritualistic purposes: ritualized repetition probably had a certain *mnemonic effect* that made the narrative framework of the divine council more memorable. But maybe most importantly, the narrative pattern of the divine council scenes may have had an *emotional effect* on its recipients by reducing anxiety.⁸⁰

Considering this last possibility, we may ask whether the divine council as a conceptualization of divinity had any *adaptive significance* for the individuals or groups maintaining it, that is, whether it related to natural—not only cultural—selection.⁸¹ In other words, did the usage of the representation offer the cultural group or its individual members some benefit that improved their survival in a certain cultural or natural environment or affected their reproduction rates? In this hypothesis, the importance and the popularity of the divine council as a cultural institution in the ancient Near Eastern cultures are related to its function of interpreting encountered hardships and adversities as the will of the god(s). Even though this kind of theological reasoning that explains misfortunes most likely did not improve the communities' physical environments, it was an impor-

78. White, *Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*, 55, 127–37.

79. Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013)—among others—has talked about the role of “Big Gods” as omniscient moral guardians and their relationship to enabling cooperation among community members. We do think that the divine council has had a significant role in moral and cooperation related functions in the ancient Near Eastern cultural sphere. Space does not allow us to go into that here, but it needs to be taken properly into account in the debate on the Big Gods theory.

80. White, *Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion*, 53–59.

81. Czachesz, *Cognitive Science*, 24–32.

tant institution from a social and psychological point of view. The divine council made it possible for the community to identify the cause of a certain hardship either as the will of the divine council, with a deeper divine meaning, or at least as inflicted by the deities' divine adversaries, leading to possible retribution in the future.

Some support for this hypothesis may be found in attribution theory. According to this theory, humans want to attain cognitive mastery of their world. To succeed in this, they need to find the reason for certain why questions in the surrounding environment.⁸² Attributing causes and effects to actors and naming the problems improve the community's resilience and make it stronger to encounter the next adversities. Taking the issue of the monster hunt as an example (cf. Dan 7, Enuma Elish, Anzu, the Baal Cycle), the monster itself offered a perfect scapegoat onto which the negative feelings of the community could be projected.⁸³ Also, combining this with immanent-justice reasoning, the knowledge about the impending punishment for the bad persons, fulfilling the expectations of the audience, is also cognitively satisfying.⁸⁴ Thus, the character of the one gaining the agency from the divine council—in many cases the divine warrior—is also of utmost importance. In the narrative scenes, the motif of a Divine Warrior slaying the monster works as a righteous retribution for all the experienced adversities.⁸⁵ The things that the scapegoat represented varied from a local plague epidemic to enslaving foreign rule of an

82. Bernard Weiner, "Attribution Theory," in *The Concise Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, ed. W. Edward Craighead and Charles B. Nemeroff, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2004), 93–94.

83. The monster-hunt motif is related to a larger debate on the so-called Conflict Myth, which appears in a number of ancient Near Eastern mythologies. For more on this topic, see Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth*; Debra Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

84. Harold H. Kelley and John L. Michela, "Attribution Theory and Research," *Annual Review of Psychology* 31 (1980): 469–70.

85. There has been an ongoing debate in previous scholarship whether the Mesopotamian Akitu festival culminated in an enacted divine council scene, in which the animal sacrifice played the role of the scapegoat. Mullen argued that this is reflected in Ps 82:5 when God blames other gods for not being able to fulfill their duties and condemns them to die like mortals; see Mullen, *Divine Council*, 237. For the Mesopotamian Akitu festival and its connections to the divine council, see, e.g., Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams: A Study in Situational Incongruity," *HR* 16 (1976): 1–19.

occupied country.⁸⁶ Even though the divine council did not necessarily have a close or direct connection to any specific ritual, as we have shown above, the narrative framework of the divine council scenes may be akin to how rituals function. Reciting, reading, or storytelling the divine council scenes may have had certain anxiety-relieving functions.

11.4. Conclusions

The study of ancient traditions' transmission benefits from the cultural evolution perspective in two ways. First, it formalizes the various processes in cultural transmission, creating a common language with others who study cultural change and socially transmitted information. Scholars of ancient history belong together with economists, engineers, and natural scientists. The job of explaining the cultural-evolutionary processes cannot be left to natural scientists or scholars of the contemporary world only. Historians are needed to bring nuance to analyzing the variety of cultural traits in their original languages and historical contexts, based on all the available evidence. Although the ancient evidence does not often result in quantifiable data, in some cases this statistical aspect (for example, the number of manuscripts during a certain period) may also be important for our understanding of variation and competition in the larger picture.

Second, the cultural-evolutionary scheme fits well with the recent acknowledgment of texts as collective products rather than as artifacts of independent individuals or great minds. Textual and other information is set in the context of social learning: humans learn and transmit information for a specific setting and purpose. Often, they copy information based on biases such as prestige, conformity, or frequency. As such, textual or visual data are not copied faithfully and comprehensively in human minds, but each transmission (for example, reading or listening to texts) produces some variation. The cultural-evolutionary framework reminds that only a part of transmission chains is extant in the form of the surviving evidence.

Here we have introduced some basic concepts of cultural evolution and explored the institution of the divine council in order to demonstrate the kinds of questions present in the cultural-evolutionary framework and to look for potential explanations for the endurance and variation of the idea.

86. However, even though this function of the divine council was most likely an important one, we do not argue that this was the only function of the divine council. Vice versa, it most likely served other socially important functions, too.

We started by outlining a pattern that helps to define which information is transmitted; the divine council in this narrow sense is about gathering around the supreme deity to solve a certain case, and the resolution comes by choosing a volunteer who gains divine agency. This information is thus not just about a deity having an impact on things on earth, but it is fundamentally social information: personal characters interacting and being placed in a narrative plot, while tension or drama is the motive for narrating the case and its outcome. We argued that, even though the idea of many deities' divine council is highly reconceptualized in some parts of the Masoretic Text, it is clearly present in others.

The exact channels and changes in transmission can only rarely be traced—it is more likely possible in specific instances, such as when textual evidence exists for Hebrew and Greek witnesses not too far removed from each other. Whether the *idea* is widespread does not only depend on whether the *texts* were widely known; oral transmission of the idea is also probable, since it is intuitive (makes use of personal characters) and in narrative form (a setting that narrates one incident). Whether the transmission was vertical (from parents to children) and/or horizontal (between one generation) in the case of Hebrew traditions is hard to tell. In the Hebrew Bible, the divine council was not a part of any major myths or laws to be taught, but it did appear in wisdom traditions (Job) and prophetic traditions (for example, Isaiah). The narrative pattern of these scenes was malleable enough for varied uses. In light of the written evidence, it was possibly more pronounced within learned circles than in home education.

In the ancient Near Eastern evidence overall, the inheritance of the motif is greatly varied, and directed by guided variation: those adopting the idea adjusted it to their context and purposes. In theory, it is also a possibility that a certain case was *not* inherited; the authors independently created a scene that looks like the same scene in other sources. Accordingly, the divine council was not just a belief to be learned but also a way of structuring information. We propose that the divine council pattern that appears in so many literary sources may have worked as a vessel of transmission. In most cases, there was probably some awareness of the pattern from earlier attestations; the pattern is sufficiently identifiable in a wide range of different sources from various time periods, even though it is not always comprehensively narrated.

We suggested several reasons for the success of the divine council idea. It fits with the anthropomorphic conceptions of deities and is

thus relatively easy to remember. It mirrors the cognitive schema of how humans address problems and threats by identifying a cause and choosing a delegate to proceed with a solution. Part of its endurance is also based on its resonance with immanent-justice reasoning: divine justice may be found via a certain procedure in the divine council. It may even alleviate stress and anxiety by providing a way to attribute the origin of the problem to outside of the human sphere, not only blaming the gods but sometimes even by envisioning ways in which humans may gain divine agency and participate in solving the problems (either through a human participant in the divine council or by narrating the event and assuring the ones hearing this that the issue is being processed). The idea reappears forcefully in the Qumran scrolls, in which the divine sphere is frequently depicted as other divine beings (*elim*, or holy ones) around the Supreme God; this information is not only tolerated by these authors but cherished, as it provides humans access to participate in divine wisdom and thus blurs the boundaries between human and heavenly agents.

In the end, we may ask how the divine council information relates to god-beliefs in general. Why is this pattern persistent, even if problematic for some ancient and modern believers in terms of one-god religious systems? First, the idea facilitates information processing. Ancient Near Eastern gods were overwhelmingly thought of as persons, and with the person category come common assumptions about beings with a mind (and sometimes also a body): they think, make decisions, communicate, and are keen on interacting with other beings that have minds. The divine council is a natural extension of the personal-god concept. Instead of conceptualizing a Supreme God in very abstract terms or believing that acting alone is his supreme power, it is easier to think of a personal god acting through mediators. Second, it is catchy information: the human social brain is tuned to processing information about interactions, social dilemmas, and threats. Even though the idea could be in tension with later theological ideas, it was possible that the pattern itself spread easily and effectively. Third, this information contains multiple ideas in a distinct package. It reveals information about the divine sphere but also addresses in a malleable way any issues of concern for humans; it can be modified and adjusted to many settings and agents—a god may have different identities, and (lesser) gods may be changed into angels or humans. The idea was sufficiently easy to reconceptualize and fit into new schemes. Compared to competing information of god(s) as impersonal, remote, self-sufficient, and clandestine, the divine council idea succeeded in several contexts to

maintain its attraction and transmission. In this enterprise, our investigation was limited to certain examples of texts from the ancient Near East. However, one may be keen to ask, whether the same literary pattern can be found in literary sources outside the ancient Near East as well. We leave this question open for later scholarship.

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12

Psalm 29: Comparative Approaches

Reinhard Müller and Joanna Töyräänvuori

12.1. Introduction

Psalm 29 is not only one of the most powerful pieces of Hebrew poetry, it is probably also one of the oldest texts of the Hebrew Bible.¹ Substantial arguments support the view that this poem attests an early period of the cult of Yahweh. Its middle part revolves around the approach of Yahweh's thundering voice in peripheral regions of the cosmos, thereby depicting Yahweh as a Syro-Palestinian storm god. The invocation of Yahweh's voice is framed by hymnic passages proclaiming Yahweh's enthronement as divine king. With its poetic forms and imagery, the psalm proves to be a genuine piece of northwest Semitic poetry, particularly resembling the poetic traditions of Late Bronze Age (1550–1190 BCE) Ugarit.

This chapter discusses the combination of different research methods in the investigation of Ps 29. The intention is to use both comparative texts, mainly from ancient Ugarit, and iconographic depictions from Syrian glyptic to see whether a more accurate translation and a better understanding of the psalm may be reached through a triangulating

1. See, e.g., John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), 3; Stanislav Segert, "Poetry and Arithmetic: Psalms 29 and 137," in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt*, ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Diethard Römheld, BZAW 278 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 166–68; Reinhard Müller, "The Origins of YHWH in Light of the Earliest Psalms," in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, BZAW 484 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 211–13, 220–21.

approach.² The study of Ps 29 in the context of Ugaritic texts is not new, as the psalm was one of the first to be compared with the newly discovered texts from the Syrian site of Ras Shamra in the 1930s.³ Using ancient iconographic evidence to illustrate and elucidate texts of the Hebrew Bible is also a path well-traveled,⁴ and the method of iconographic exegesis is taking an ever firmer foothold in the expanding methodological canon of biblical studies.⁵ The comparative and iconographic methods seem uniquely suited for the investigation of Ps 29.

In the following, we present new linguistic and poetological observations on the psalm, and we demonstrate what can be deduced from these observations about its literary history and its tradition-historical backgrounds. Based on this, we discuss the closest Ugaritic parallels to the psalm in order to establish the common elements between the texts. Next, examples of iconographic motifs from Syrian glyptic of the Middle Bronze Age are examined in order to showcase how these common elements shared by the texts present themselves in a visual vocabulary. It is our hope that this combination of approaches can further aid in our understanding of the contents of the psalm in its original cultural context.

2. Triangulation is a method used in the social sciences in which two or more research methods are combined in the study of the same phenomenon. See Norman K. Denzin, ed., *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook*, 5th ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2006). For the use of the method in biblical studies, see Joanna Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth: North West Semitic Political Mythology in the Hebrew Bible*, AOAT 457 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018).

3. For a general introduction to Ugarit, see Marguerite Yon, *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006). The discovery of the texts was followed by the decipherment of the cuneiform alphabet and the provisional translations of the principal texts between the years 1929 and 1932; see Adrian H. W. Curtis, *Ugarit: Ras Shamra. Cities of the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 18–33.

4. See esp. the ground-breaking contribution by Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen*, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), which refers more than once to Ps 29; see esp. p. 192.

5. See Izaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, eds., *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, LHBOTS 588 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Ryan P. Bonfiglio, Izaak J. de Hulster, and Brent A. Strawn, *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

12.2. Remarks on the History of Research

Psalm 29 has been exposed to intense scrutiny in exegetical research. Hermann Gunkel classified it as an early hymn,⁶ and in his footsteps it was conceptualized as an enthronement psalm.⁷ Although the ritual context of the psalm is lacking, its hymnal form strongly suggests that its original *Sitz im Leben* was related to the cult.⁸

The vocabulary, imagery, and poetic forms shared between the psalm and the Ugaritic texts were noticed early on.⁹ Already in 1935 Harold Louis Ginsberg, inspired by the findings from Ugarit, postulated that Ps 29 goes back to a Phoenician or Canaanite hymn for the god Baal that was adapted for the early Israelite veneration of Yahweh.¹⁰ A similar claim was made by Theodor Gaster in 1946.¹¹ Including modifications, the idea that Ps 29 is essentially a Canaanite—and not Israelite—psalm in which only the name of the god Baal was secondarily replaced by the name Yahweh was taken up by several scholars.¹² Further discussion, however, showed

6. Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 122; Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 90.

7. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Kristiania, Norway: Dybwad, 1922), 3–4, et passim; and see, e.g., Adrian H. W. Curtis, “The ‘Subjugation of the Waters’ Motif in the Psalms; Imagery or Polemic?,” *JSS* 23 (1978): 245–54.

8. See, e.g., Arnold A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 1:232; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 243; Reinhard Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott: Studien zur althebräischen Kultlyrik anhand ausgewählter Psalmen*, BZAW 387 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 103–32.

9. See esp. Segert, “Poetry and Arithmetic,” 170–72, for a thorough comparison of the vocabulary of the psalm and the Ugaritic texts. For the poetic forms, see, e.g., Anderson, *Book of Psalms*, 1:233; Oswald Loretz, *Ugarit-Texte und Thronbesteigungspsalmen: Die Metamorphose des Regenspenders Baal-Jahwe*, UBL 7 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1988), 98–129; Segert, “Poetry and Arithmetic,” 168; Dennis Pardee, “On Psalm 29: Structure and Meaning,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr., VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 153–83.

10. Harold Louis Ginsberg, “A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter,” in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti* (1935) (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1938), 472–76.

11. Theodor H. Gaster, “Psalm 29,” *JQR* NS 37 (1946): 55–65.

12. E.g., Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 244; Carola Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 213; Segert, “Poetry and Arithmetic,” 167.

that it is not necessary to assume that Ps 29 was adopted in its entirety or in its current form from a Canaanite or Phoenician origin. While there are evident thematic similarities between the psalm and the Ugaritic texts and even shared terminology, there is no text in the Ugaritic corpus that corresponds to Ps 29 as a whole.¹³ For instance, both broadly contain the motif of a divine victory over chaotic powers and mention the deity's voice in this context, but the particular hymnic form of Ps 29 and its precise sequence of motifs is not attested in Ugarit.

Based on such observations, other scholars conceptualized Ps 29 as an originally Israelite or Hebrew poem. Peter C. Craigie, for example, regarded Ps 29 as an example of ancient Hebrew war poetry. He admitted, however, that the victory hymn of Ps 29 may have been modeled after the theme of Baal's enthronement. Furthermore, he argued that similar themes are familiar from the war poetry of the broader ancient world, in which storm gods were often also venerated as gods of war.¹⁴ Several scholars specified the idea that Ps 29 is a genuinely Israelite piece by interpreting the psalm as a pointed polemic against older Canaanite or pre-Israelite conceptions.¹⁵ Jörg Jeremias, for example, suggested that a Canaanite hymn on Baal may lie in the background of verses 5–9a, 10, but he saw Ps 29 as a whole as a demythologizing *interpretatio israelitica* of Canaanite traditions about Baal and El.¹⁶ Along similar lines, Hermann Spieckermann explained the “idea cluster” of the cedars shattered by Yahweh's voice and the trembling mountain ranges Sirion and Lebanon (vv. 5–6) as signaling polemic against the god Baal, while he postulated that, according to the framing verses 1b–2 and 9b–10, Yahweh took over El's undisputed kingship.¹⁷ Oswald Loretz even interpreted the psalm as a product of post-exilic monotheistic Yahwism, for which remnants of ancient Canaanite and early Israelite traditions had been translated and transformed.¹⁸ In contrast to such

13. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat*, 99; Loretz, *Ugarit-Texte*, 134–44.

14. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 245–48.

15. See, apart from the following positions, e.g., Frank Moore Cross, “Notes on a Canaanite Psalm in the Old Testament,” *BASOR* 117 (1950): 19–21; Anderson, *Book of Psalms*, 1:233; Segert, “Poetry and Arithmetic,” 167.

16. Jörg Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes in den Psalmen: Israels Begegnung mit dem kanaänischen Mythos in den Jahwe-Königs-Psalmen*, FRLANT 141 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 29–44.

17. Hermann Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen*, FRLANT 148 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 174–79.

18. Loretz, *Ugarit-Texte*, 231.

models, Reinhard G. Kratz programmatically attributed Ps 29 to “remnants of Hebrew paganism” from the monarchic period. He stressed that the original form of the psalm, which he found in verses 1b–9, appears as a nonpolemical ancient Hebrew summary of the myth that is also attested by the Ugaritic Baal cycle.¹⁹

Based on the motifs in the framing verses 1b–2 and 9b–10 (see also the term אֱל “El / god” in v. 3), it has also been suggested that the god El may have been the original protagonist of the psalm, or that the psalm attests a blending of Baal and El traditions.²⁰ Carola Kloos and Oswald Loretz, however, demonstrated that there is no reason to suppose that Ps 29 speaks about El or specifically adduces El traditions.²¹ This is supported by the combined methods of analyzing the psalm proposed in this chapter.

12.3. A New Translation of Psalm 29

Apart from the superscription (v. 1*), the psalm can be structured into three parts: an opening exhortation (vv. 1*–2), a description of a theophany (vv. 3–9), and concluding proclamations (vv. 10–11). The lines that are especially important for our discussion include the reference to divine beings (v. 1a*), the name of the deity (v. 2a), his voice and its effects on the cosmos and the nature (vv. 3–9*), the breaking of cedars (v. 5), the two mountains Lebanon and Sirion associated with a calf and a wild-ox (v. 6), a possible reference to the divine weapon (v. 9b), and the deity’s enthronement upon the flood as everlasting king (v. 10). Numerous motifs have parallels in the Ugaritic poetry and in other ancient Near Eastern texts and can also be illuminated by ancient Syro-Palestinian iconography.²²

19. Reinhard Gregor Kratz, “Reste hebräischen Heidentums am Beispiel der Psalmen,” in *Mythos und Geschichte: Kleine Schriften III*, FAT 102 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015): 165–69; Kratz, “Der Mythos vom Königtum Gottes in Kanaan und Israel,” in *Mythos und Geschichte: Kleine Schriften III*, 150–54.

20. See esp. Werner H. Schmidt, *Königtum Gottes in Ugarit und Israel: Zur Herkunft der Königsprädikation Jahwes*, 2nd ed., BZAW 80 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966), 46–47; Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes*, 34–35, 42–43; Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 165–79.

21. Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat*, 37; Loretz, *Ugarit-Texte*, 195; see Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 128–31.

22. Translations of the Hebrew texts are ours.

- 1 A Psalm for/of David.²³
 Bring to Yahweh, O sons of gods,²⁴
 bring to Yahweh honor and strength,
 2 bring to Yahweh the honor of his name,
 worship Yahweh in holy adornment!
 3 **The voice of Yahweh is over the waters,**
 the god of honor has thundered,
 Yahweh is over great waters!
 4 **The voice of Yahweh is full of power,**
 the voice of Yahweh is full of majesty!
 5 **The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars!**
 And Yahweh shattered the cedars of the Lebanon.
 6 And he made²⁵ Lebanon skip like a calf
 and Sirjon like a young wild-ox.
 7 **The voice of Yahweh rakes up²⁶ flames of fire!**
 8 **The voice of Yahweh makes the steppe go into labor,**
 Yahweh makes the steppe of Qadesh / the holy steppe (?)²⁷ go into
 labor!
 9 **The voice of Yahweh makes deer calve**
 and causes {caused}²⁸ bleating kids to be brought hastily to birth,²⁹
 and in his palace is a word of honor / Ayyamur-of-honor (?),³⁰

23. Thus MT. LXX has additionally ἐξῆσθαι σακχαῖς “On the final feast day of the tent” (see below, §12.4.1).

24. Thus MT. Some medieval Hebrew manuscripts read בני אילים “sons of rams.” LXX contains for this colon a double translation that includes both variants: Ἐνέγκατε τῷ κυρίῳ, υἱοὶ θεοῦ, / ἐνέγκατε τῷ κυρίῳ υἱοὺς κριῶν “Bring to the Lord, O divine sons, / bring to the Lord young rams.”

25. The parallelism indicates that the form וירקידם witnesses an enclitic *-ma* (see below, §12.4.4), known particularly from Ugaritic (Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 2nd ed., AOAT 273 [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012], 829–30) and probably rarely also found in ancient Hebrew, see Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 91–107; Rudolf Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 180–81. This explanation of וירקידם was first proposed by Ginsberg, “Phoenician Hymn,” 474, and taken up, e.g., by Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 166 n. 3. Pace James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 31–37; and Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 111.

26. See below, §12.4.4.

27. See below, §12.4.4.

28. See n. 53.

29. See below, §12.4.4.

30. Assuming an erroneous dittography of כלו in the later textual tradition, see below, §12.4.5.

- 10 Yahweh took his seat on the flood,
 {and} Yahweh has become king {took his seat as king}³¹ forever!
- 11 *May Yahweh give strength to his people,
 may Yahweh bless his people with well-being!*

Original form: vv. 3ab β , 4–5a, 7–9a

Hymnic frame: vv. 1b–2, 3b α , 9b–10*

Plea for blessing: v. 11

Superscription: v. 1a

Marginal Glosses: v. 5b, 10b*

12.4. Commentary and Analysis

12.4.1. The Title (Psalm 29:1a)

It is likely that Ps 29 underwent changes during its transmission. The title relating the psalm to David (מזמור לדוד “A psalm for/of David”) was probably secondarily placed above the text, as can be suspected for most superscriptions of the psalms.³² Like in many other cases, there is no evident link between the poem itself and the Davidization implied in the title.³³ The superscription מזמור לדוד integrates Ps 29 into the first collection of Davidic psalms in Pss 3–41*. Precisely the same title, without additional terms and phrases, occurs in the first Davidic psalter only in Pss 15 and 23,³⁴ but, combined with other material in the superscriptions, מזמור לדוד is found nineteen times in the first Davidic psalter and therefore appears as a rather unspecific feature. It may be speculated that לדוד here goes back to a functional designation, originally meaning “for ‘the David,’” namely, for the Davidic king. This would fit a use of the psalm in the monarchic era. To be sure, such a theory would need to be established on a much broader fundament.

31. See below, §12.4.5.

32. Cf., e.g., Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen I–III* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 41.

33. This is particularly evident in relation to the superscription *lkrt/li Kirta* “of/about (King) Kirta” on the tablets of the Kirta epic (*KTU* 1.14 i.1 and 1.16 i.1), which has been compared with the לדוד of the psalms. It should be noted that this superscription corresponds to the phrase *lbʿl/li Baʿala* “on/about Baal” in *KTU* 1.6 i.1.

34. Outside the first Davidic Psalter only in Pss 141:1 and 143:1.

More important for our investigation is a phenomenon of literary growth that is documented for the title. The Septuagint attests in verse 1 an expanded superscription, containing the non-Masoretic plus ἐξοδίου σακηνης “On the final feast day of the tent.” As indicated by the term ἐξοδίου “finale, final feast day” in Lev 23:36 and Num 29:35, Ps 29(28):1 LXX ascribes the psalm to the final day of the Sukkoth festival. This expansion suggests that the psalm was transmitted during the Hellenistic age in relation to a specific cultic *Sitz im Leben*. This cultic use in an advanced phase of the postmonarchic era could be a late echo of much earlier ritual contexts in which the psalm was sung (see below, §§12.4.4 and 12.4.5).

12.4.2. The Concluding Plea (Psalm 29:11)

An important question pertains to the literary-historical origin of verse 11. In a formal perspective, the final four cola of the psalm (vv. 10–11), every one of which contains the divine name Yahweh, seem to balance the opening four cola (vv. 1b–2), which likewise have the name Yahweh in every colon. However, in a poetological perspective, beginning and end differ structurally. The four opening cola (vv. 1b–2) form a tetracolon built on a staircase parallelism, but the concluding four cola (vv. 10–11) must be grouped, based on the synonymous parallelisms in verses 10 and 11, as two separate bicola:

הבו ליהוה בני אלים
הבו ליהוה כבוד ועז
הבו ליהוה כבוד שמו
השתחוו ליהוה בהדרת קדש

יהוה למבול ישב
[וישב] יהוה מלך לעולם

יהוה עז לעמו יתן
יהוה יברך את עמו בשלום

- 1b Bring to Yahweh, O sons of gods,
bring to Yahweh honor and strength,
- 2 bring to Yahweh the honor of his name,
worship Yahweh in holy adornment!

- 10 Yahweh took his seat on the flood,
 {and} Yahweh has become king {took his seat as king}³⁵ forever!
- 11 May Yahweh give strength to his people,
 may Yahweh bless his people with well-being!

According to a classic theory proposed by Justus Olshausen already in 1853, the plea in verse 11 is not a genuine part of the psalm but a liturgical addition.³⁶ This is primarily suggested by content-related arguments. Although verse 11 resumes the term עַז “strength” from verse 1, the reference to Yahweh’s people is on a completely different level than the images of the divine king and the thunderstorm in verses 1*–10. While the second colon of verse 1* calls the “sons of gods” to bring “honor and *strength*” (כְּבוֹד וְעַז) to Yahweh, verse 11a expresses the wish that “Yahweh gives *strength* to his people” (יְהוָה עַז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן) and “blesses his people with well-being” (יְהוָה יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם). It remains unclear how precisely this wish is related to the preceding imagery. Does the psalm’s opening (v. 1b) really imply that Yahweh is at the end called to pass on the strength (עַז) he received from the gods as a kind of tribute (see below, §12.4.5) to his people? Nothing in verses 1b–2 prepares for such a perspective.³⁷ In other words, it is rather unexpected that the concluding verse 11 focuses on Yahweh’s people and expresses this wish.

Furthermore, Ps 29:11 connects the psalm with Ps 28, which ends with a similar plea that Yahweh may bless his people (v. 9), preceded by the statement that Yahweh “is their strength” (v. 8).³⁸ Since Ps 28 is in its core an individual lament (vv. 1*–7), the concluding references to Yahweh’s people in verses 8–9 (in v. 8 even combined with a reference to Yahweh’s anointed one) do not appear to be an original part of the psalm. Refer-

35. See below, §12.4.5.

36. Justus Olshausen, *Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1853), 141; and see, e.g., Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 124; Ginsberg, “Phoenician Hymn,” 474; Baruch Margulis, “The Canaanite Origin of Psalm 29 Reconsidered,” *Bib* 51 (1970): 345–46; Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 169; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1–50*, NEB 29 (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 181; Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 104–7.

37. Pace Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes*, 43–44.

38. Possibly originally to be read as יְהוָה עַז לְעַמּוֹ “Yahweh is strength for his people” with medieval Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Peshitta (see *BHS*), instead of the potentially corrupt reading of MT יְהוָה עַז לָמוֹ “Yahweh is strength for them.”

ences to Yahweh's people that can be suspected to have been secondarily added can also be found at the end of some other psalms.³⁹

On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that Ps 29:11 has distinct parallels in ancient Near Eastern texts. Hans-Peter Müller pointed to a fourth-century Phoenician inscription from Cyprus in which a Cypriote king dedicated a stela to the god בעל עז "Baal-of-strength" who provided victory to the king "and all the people of Kition:"⁴⁰

ויתן לי ולכל עם כתי בעל עז [עז]
ונצחת בכל אבן ובעזרנם הפפים
ויטנאת אנך וכל עם כתי אית התרפי אז לב[על] עז אדני
כ שמע קלם
יברכם

And Baal-of-Stre[ngth] gave me and all the people of Kition [stre]ngth.
And I prevailed over all our enemies and their helpers, the Paphiers.
And I erected—and all the people of Kition—this sign of victory for
Ba[‘al]-of-Strength, my lord,
for he listened to their voice.
He shall bless them!⁴¹

These dedicatory phrases, including the final blessing, resemble Ps 29:11 closely:

יהוה עז לעמו יתן
יהוה יברך את עמו בשלום

May Yahweh give strength to his people,
may Yahweh bless his people with well-being!

To be sure, Ps 29* (apart from the secondary reference to David in the title) lacks any reference to a human king. This seems to be a decisive difference between Ps 29:11 and the Kition inscription.

39. Apart from Ps 28:9, cf. esp. Pss 3:9; 14:7; 25:22; 34:23; 68:35–36.

40. Hans-Peter Müller, "‘Jhwh gebe seinem Volke Kraft.’ Zum Hintergrund der alttestamentlichen Geschichtsreligion," *ZTK* 98 (2001): 271–75.

41. KAI 288:3–5, own translation; see Ingo Kottsieper, "Nordwestsemitische Texte (8. Jh. v. Chr.–3. Jh. n. Chr.)," in *Staatsverträge, Herrscherinschriften und andere Dokumente zur politischen Geschichte*, TUAT 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 315–16.

An even closer parallel to Ps 29:11, to which Michael Barré drew attention,⁴² is found in the eighth-century bilingual inscription from Karatepe.⁴³ The Phoenician version of this inscription contains a passage comprising all crucial words of Ps 29:11, except for the divine name יהוה and the term עמו “his people:”

וּבְרַךְ בַּעַל כְּר[נ] תְּרִישׁ אֵית אֲזַתוּד חִים וְשֻׁלָּם וְעַן אֲדַר עַל כָּל מֶלֶךְ
לְתַתִּי בַּעַל כְּרַנְתְּרִישׁ וְכָל אֱלֹהֵי קֶרֶת לְאֲזַתוּד אֲרַךְ יָמָם וְרַב שָׁנָת וּרְשָׁאֵת נַעֲמַת וְעַן
אֲדַר עַל כָּל מֶלֶךְ

And may Baal KRNTYŠ⁴⁴ bless Azatiwada with life and well-being and strength exceeding over every king, so that Baal KRNTYŠ and all the gods of the city give to Azatiwada length of days and multitude of years and good abundance and strength exceeding over every king.⁴⁵

יְהוָה עֲזֵ לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן
יְהוָה יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשֻׁלָּם

May Yahweh give strength to his people,
may Yahweh bless his people with well-being!

The comparison between the Karatepe inscription and Ps 29:11 shows a difference similar as with regard to the Kition inscription. Instead of referring to a king, Ps 29:11 speaks of Yahweh's people. Contrary to the Kition inscription, the Karatepe inscription in this passage does not refer to the people.

Finally, it must be noted that the Baal cycle from Ugarit in a certain context refers to Baal's people. After Baal has died, both the divine patriarch El and 'Anat bewail him with the words:⁴⁶

42. Michael Barré, “A Phoenician Parallel to Psalm 29,” *HAR* 13 (1991): 25–32. This contribution is not referenced in Müller's 2001 article “[J]hwh gebe seinem Volke Kraft.”

43. KAI 26 A iii.2–7 = KARATEPE 1; see John David Hawkins, *Inscriptions of the Iron Age*, vol. 1 of *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 45–68.

44. On this divine name Philip C. Schmitz, “Phoenician KRNTYŠ, Archaic Greek *KOPYNHTHPIOΣ, and the Storm God of Aleppo,” *KUSATU* 10 (2009): 119–60, who proposes, based on the Archaic Greek KORYNH “mace,” that this name “designates a mace-bearing representation of the Storm god, probably the Storm god of Aleppo” (119).

45. Own translation, following Hawkins, *Inscriptions of the Iron Age*, 55.

46. KTU 1.5 vi.23–25; 1.6 i.6–7, own translation. See Herbert Niehr, “Mythen und

b'l . mt .
my . lim . bn dgn
my . hmlt . atr . b'l

Baal is dead!

What is to become of the people of Dagan's son?

What is to become of the multitudes who follow Baal?

“The people of Dagan's son” (*lim bn dgn*) and “the multitudes who follow Baal” (*hmlt atr b'l*) seem to be the large number of human beings who venerate and serve the storm god. After Baal's death, they are not only orphaned and abandoned but also in existential danger, since their life depends on the divinely given rain.⁴⁷

These ancient Near Eastern parallels to Ps 29:11 shed light on the tradition-historical background of the verse. The Ugaritic Baal cycle demonstrates that the concept of a deity's people was not limited to Israelite tradition. In the Baal Cycle, this concept has notable universalistic features; Baal's people do not have a certain national identity but seem to comprise all humanity. In Ps 29:11, it is per se not clear how Yahweh's people are imagined, and one may ask whether the verse originally implied a similar concept as the reference to Baal's people in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle. However, in the context of the Psalms, it seems evident that Yahweh's people are his chosen people in Israel.

The parallels in the royal inscriptions from Karatepe (eighth century) and Kition (fourth century) come closer to the expressions in Ps 29:11. Furthermore, they can be related to a particularistic concept of the deity's people. But Ps 29:11, by not mentioning a human king, differs from these inscriptions as well. In light of the Karatepe and Kition inscriptions, the idea that Yahweh conveys strength (עֶז) and well-being (שְׁלוֹם) to his people seems to mirror a concept according to which the storm god was transferring such gifts to a human ruler. Although the Kition inscription mentions the people of Kition besides their king as receiving strength from the deity,

Epen aus Ugarit,” in *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen*, TUAT 8 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014), 229–30.

47. Cf. the reference to “the end” that “has come to Yahweh's people Israel” in Amos 8:2, and see Reinhard Müller, “Zur Entstehung der Amosvisionen,” in *Fortgeschriebenes Gotteswort: Studien zu Geschichte, Theologie und Auslegung des Alten Testaments*, ed. Reinhard Müller, Urmias Nömmik, and Juha Pakkala (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 285.

in Ps 29:11 the people of Yahweh completely replace the role of a human king. It is they—and not he—who appear as the immediate and sole beneficiaries of the divine gifts. This difference supports the classic assumption that Ps 29:11 is a later addition, probably from the postmonarchic age.

12.4.3. The Composition of Frame and Middle Part

The middle part of Ps 29, which invokes the voice of Yahweh (vv. 3–9a), is framed by verses 1b–2 and 9b–10 with images of Yahweh's divine kingship. The way in which the framing passages and the middle section are juxtaposed indicates that the frame was added secondarily.⁴⁸

A fundamental argument pointing in this direction lies in the fact that the invocation of the divine voice in verses 3–9* can be read and understood on its own. The sevenfold calling of the divine voice (vv. 3–4, 7–9a) is not closely linked with the opening and concluding passages of the psalm. Furthermore, the framing passages contain a rather different imagery than the middle part.

At its beginning and its end, the middle part was recognizably secondarily connected with the frame. In verse 3, in the first invocation of Yahweh's voice, the second colon (אל הכבוד הרעים “the god of honor has thundered”) resumes the word כבוד “honor” from the opening verses 1b–2 and combines it with the divine thunder invoked by the repeated phrase קול יהוה “the voice of Yahweh.” In a poetological perspective, the second colon of verse 3 appears as intrusive, since the first and the third colon form a staircase parallelism and therefore clearly belong together:

קול יהוה על המים
אל הכבוד הרעים
יהוה על מים רבים

The voice of Yahweh is over the waters,
the god of honor has thundered,
Yahweh is over great waters.

48. Christoph Levin, “Old Testament Religion: Conflict and Peace,” in *Re-reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament*, FAT 87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 172–73; Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 107–9; Manfred Krebernik, “The Beginnings of Yahwism from an Assyriological Perspective,” in van Oorschot and Witte, *Origins of Yahwism*, 52; Müller, “Origins of YHWH,” 211.

A structure similar to the proposed original form of verse 3* is found in verse 8, since also here the second colon does not repeat the expression קול יהוה “the voice of Yahweh” but speaks of יהוה “Yahweh” instead:

קול יהוה יחיל מדבר
יחיל יהוה מדבר קדש

The voice of Yahweh makes the steppe go into labor,
Yahweh makes the steppe of Qadesh / the holy steppe (?) go into labor!

The similarity between verse 8 and verse 3* corroborates the theory that the second colon of verse 3 was secondarily added to an original bicolon.

A corresponding phenomenon suggesting a secondary connection of the frame with the middle section occurs in the final colon of verse 9, which, like the secondary verse 3ba, revolves around the term כבוד “honor:”

קול יהוה יחולל אילות
ויחשף יערות
ובהיכלו כלו אמר כבוד

The voice of Yahweh makes deer calve,
and he makes mountain goats give birth quickly,
and in his palace his entirety says “honor” (?).⁴⁹

It is completely unexpected that the divine palace (היכלו) comes into view in verse 9b. The preceding descriptions of the divine voice culminating with the view on “deer” and “mountain goats” do not prepare that the third colon suddenly speaks about the divine palace.

The frame also in general is connected rather loosely with the middle section. While the frame depicts how Yahweh is venerated in his palace and/or temple, the middle part speaks about Yahweh’s voice and its effects on the nature. Particular tensions can be observed between the “great waters” (מים רבים) in verse 3 and the “flood” (מבול) in verse 10, the terms “honor and strength” (כבוד ועז) in verse 1 and “power” (כח) and “majesty” (הדר) in verse 4, and the references to “holiness” (קדש) in verses 2 and 8. While the terms in the frame (כבוד ועז “honor and strength” in v. 2, קדש “holiness” in v. 2, מבול “flood” in v. 10) can be understood as corresponding to their counterparts in the middle section (מים רבים “great waters” in v. 3, כח “power” and הדר “majesty” in v. 4, קדש “holiness” in v. 8), the terms

49. See below, §12.4.5.

in the middle section by no means refer to their equivalents in the frame. Yahweh's enthronement upon the flood (v. 10a) could imply that he has prevailed with his voice over the great waters (v. 3), but one may question whether verse 3 and the further descriptions of the divine voice originally aimed at the concluding view on Yahweh's enthronement. Verse 4 refers to the "power" (כח) and "majesty" (הדר) expressed by Yahweh's voice, but this can be understood by itself and does not presuppose the opening passage calling the divine beings to bring "honor and strength" (כבוד ועוז) to Yahweh (v. 2). In the case of קדש "holiness," the tension is most evident. Verse 2b calls the divine beings to worship Yahweh בְּהַדְרַת קֹדֶשׁ "in holy adornment," which primarily seems to refer to Yahweh's divine attire but may also include the garments of the venerating gods that mirror Yahweh's apparel. The term הַדְרָה "adornment, attire" is clearly cognate with הֵדֵר "majesty," but when verse 4 speaks of the majesty of Yahweh's voice, this does not refer back to the mention of the divine adornment. And verse 8, by speaking of מְדַבֵּר קֹדֶשׁ, uses the word קֹדֶשׁ in a rather different sense, meaning either "the steppe of Qadesh" (possibly originally referring not to biblical Qadesh-Barnea but to the Syrian city Qadesh on the river Orontes) or "the holy steppe."⁵⁰ Be this as it may, there is no evident link between קֹדֶשׁ מְדַבֵּר in verse 8 and Yahweh's "holy adornment" in verse 2.

In light of these observations, it can be conjectured that the oldest parts of the psalm are only found in those passages that revolve around the divine voice. Here, קוֹל יְהוָה is invoked seven times, namely, in verses 3*, 4, 5a, 7a, 8 and 9a:

קוֹל יְהוָה עַל הַמִּיִּם
 יְהוָה עַל מֵי רַבִּים
 קוֹל יְהוָה בִּכְחַ
 קוֹל יְהוָה בְּהֵדֵר
 קוֹל יְהוָה שֹׁבֵר אֲרָזִים
 קוֹל יְהוָה חֹצֵב לִהְבוֹת אֵשׁ
 קוֹל יְהוָה יַחִיל מְדַבֵּר
 יַחִיל יְהוָה מְדַבֵּר קֹדֶשׁ
 קוֹל יְהוָה יַחֲלֹל אֵילוֹת
 וַיַּחֲשֹׁף יַעֲרֹת

50. See below, §12.4.4.

- 3* The voice of Yahweh is over the waters,
Yahweh is over great waters!
- 4 The voice of Yahweh is full of power,
the voice of Yahweh is full of majesty!
- 5a The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars,
7 the voice of Yahweh rakes up flames of fire!
- 8 The voice of Yahweh makes the steppe go into labor,
Yahweh makes the steppe of Qadesh / the holy steppe (?) go into labor!
- 9a The voice of Yahweh makes deer calve
and causes bleating kids to be brought hastily to birth!

A particular problem in the structure of Ps 29 is related to the position of verses 5b–6. These cola notably interrupt the sequence of sentences opened by קול יהוה, and the poetic structure seems disturbed. Verse 7 appears as a single colon in a series of bicola, which is odd. The synonymous structure of verse 6 suggests interpreting the concluding ם of the form וירקדם either as an enclitic *-ma*⁵¹ or as a secondarily added suffix linked with verse 5b. The chiasmic parallelisms of the two mountain names and the comparative phrases כמו עגל “like a calf” and כמו בן ראמים “like a young wild-ox” suggest that the object of the verb וירקדם “and he made (them?) skip” are the mountain ranges לבנון “Lebanon” and שרין “Sirjon” — and not the cedars mentioned in verse 5:⁵²

וירקדם כמו עגל לבנון
ושרין כמו בן ראמים

And he made Lebanon skip like a calf
and Sirjon like a young wild-ox.

Compared to this, verse 5b (וַיִּשְׁבֹּר יְהוָה אֶת אֲרֵזֵי הַלְבָּנוֹן) “And Yahweh shattered the cedars of the Lebanon”), whose style is reminiscent of prose and combines the image of verse 5a (קול יהוה שבר ארזים) “The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars”) with the mention of Lebanon in verse 6 (note the article in הַלְבָּנוֹן), appears as a later gloss. Also verse 6 appears as intrusive, probably on an older level, tearing an original bicolon consisting of verses 5a and 7 apart:

51. See n. 25.

52. This is supported by the parallelism of *lbnn* and *šryn* in *KTU* 1.4 vi.18–21 (see below, §12.4.5).

קול יהוה שבר ארזים
 וישבר יהוה את ארזי הלבנון
 וירקידם כמו עגל לבנון
 ושריץ כמו בן ראמים
 קול יהוה חצב להבות אש

- 5 The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars,
 and Yahweh shattered the cedars of the Lebanon.
 6 And he made Lebanon skip like a calf
 and Sirjon like a young wild-ox.
 7 The voice of Yahweh rakes flames of fire.

The narrative form “and he made (them?) skip” seems to refer to a distant past. This can be connected with the past-tense aspect in the second colon of verse 3 (אל הכבוד הרעים “the god of honor has thundered”) and in verse 10 (Yahweh took his seat upon the flood // [וישב] “{and} Yahweh has become king {took his seat as king}⁵³ forever!”). According to this logic, the middle section of the psalm looks back on the primeval event in which Yahweh established his kingdom over the cosmos. As a reaction to his approach and his victory over chaotic powers, Lebanon and Sirjon jumped for joy as a calf and young wild-ox.

However, this primeval perspective is not evidently implied in the seven invocations of the divine voice of which the oldest literary form of the psalm seems to have consisted. Thus, the intrusive verse 6 probably did not belong to the core of the psalm but to the added frame.

12.4.4. The Oldest Form of Psalm 29 (vv. 3ab β , 4–5a, 7–9a)

The reconstructed original form of Ps 29 comprises five bicola. Seven cola are opened with the words “the voice of Yahweh” (קול יהוה) (vv. 3a, 4a and b, 5a, 7, 8a, 9a α). This monotonous opening makes the poem sound like a litany or a magic incantation aiming to evoke the crashing sound of thunder:

קול יהוה על המים
 יהוה על מים רבים
 קול יהוה בכח
 קול יהוה בהדר
 קול יהוה שבר ארזים

53. See below, §12.4.5.

קול יהוה חצב להבות אש
 קול יהוה יחיל מדבר
 יחיל יהוה מדבר קדש
 קול יהוה יחולל אילות
 ויחשף יערות

- 3* The voice of Yahweh is over the waters,
 Yahweh is over great waters!
 4 The voice of Yahweh is full of power,
 the voice of Yahweh is full of majesty!
 5a The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars,
 7 the voice of Yahweh rakes up flames of fire!
 8 The voice of Yahweh makes the steppe go into labor,
 Yahweh makes the steppe of Qadesh / the holy steppe (?) go into labor!
 9a The voice of Yahweh makes deer calve,
 and causes⁵⁴ bleating kids to be brought hastily to birth!

There is also some variation. Verses 3* and 8 form a certain kind of staircase parallelisms in which words of the first colon are repeated in the second. The syntax of the cola changes in two steps. While the first two bicola (vv. 3* and 4) contain nominal clauses, the central bicolon (vv. 5a, 7) has two participial clauses, and verbal clauses occur in the final two bicola (vv. 8, 9a). This increasing dynamic echoes how the sound of thunder intensifies and comes near. Yahweh's seven thunders resemble Baal's "seven lightnings" (*šb't brqm*) and "eight bundles of thunder" in the Ugaritic hymn *KTU* 1.101, as first noted by John Day.⁵⁵

The poem that forms the core of Ps 29 begins by evoking the divine voice as it is heard in the distance "over great waters." מים רבים refers to the body of waters in the skies (compare Ps 148:4 which, albeit in a much younger context, presupposes the same cosmological concept). Yet, this image is probably more than a naturalistic description of how the ancients imagined the upper parts of the cosmos. In Ps 93:4, מים רבים "the great

54. The present tense aspect of the other cola suggests reading the verbal form ויחשף as *weyiqtol*, see Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 168. Spieckermann proposed also for the forms in vv. 5b and 6 that the past tense aspect is due to a Masoretic misunderstanding. However, the past tense aspect of v. 3aβ indicates that reading ויחשף as a narrative form was already implied by the combination of the middle section with the frame.

55. John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI," *VT* 29 (1979): 143–44.

waters” are, besides the sea (ים), depicted as roaring and rearing up against Yahweh’s supremacy “on high.” Waters and Sea are in this psalm clearly imagined as living beings and chaotic powers—a destructive moving entity that needs to be tamed and subjugated by Yahweh’s might. The reference to מים רבים in Ps 93:4 suggests that Ps 29:3* alludes to Yahweh’s fight against the chaotic waters, which was in all likelihood an early Hebrew version of the ancient myth of the storm god’s victory over the sea. This mythological interpretation of verse 3 is supported by the ensuing verse 4, which speaks of the “power” (כח) and “majesty” (הדר) attested by Yahweh’s voice. These divine qualities can be understood as necessary prerequisites for the deity’s supremacy over the cosmos.

The following lines (vv. 5–9*) seem to refer to a thunderstorm, but it is notable that the motifs of these verses are only indirectly related to the most obvious images of this meteorological phenomenon. Yahweh’s voice breaks cedars, and it rakes or fuels flames of fire (vv. 5a, 7). It makes the steppe go into labor, and under its crash deer and mountain goats deliver their offspring (vv. 8, 9a). The peculiar combination of these motifs shows that Ps 29:5–9* is not a pure naturalistic description. Rather, like the preceding verses, also these lines are full of symbolic meaning. By breaking lofty cedars, symbols of pride and objects of royal prowess, Yahweh’s voice proves its superiority over the inhabited world. This may have had political implications. By raking flames, Yahweh’s voice demonstrates its ability to unleash the consuming powers of fire. The latter motif may be compared with an image on a seal that seems to connect the life-giving voice of the storm god with the fire burning on an altar.⁵⁶ The fire of Yahweh (אש יהוה) falling on his altar on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:38) may echo this tradition. Verse 8 speaks about the steppe that is brought into labor by Yahweh’s voice (קול יהוה יחיל מדבר), which metaphorically describes how the earth is shaken by the crashing sound of thunder. According to a similar passage in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Baal’s “holy voice made the earth tremble, / the saying of his lips the mountains.”⁵⁷ An even closer parallel is found in an Akkadian prayer to Adad, who was praised as

*ša[q]û [anq]ullê mušaznin [nu]hši
ša ina rigmīšu nišū ušḥarrarā
uḥtappā qerbēte iḥlū šērū*

56. See below, §12.6. and figure 2.

57. See below, §12.5.

(the one) who ir[rig]ates the [hea]t, pours out [ferti]ty,
because of his voice people are deathly still,
meadowlands are broken up, steppes come into labor.⁵⁸

Both texts use the conspicuous metaphor of coming into labor (Ps 29:8: יחיל < חיל; Adad 1a: *iḫilū* < *hiālum*), which connects the trembling with the gift of new life, and both mention in this context the steppe (Ps 29:8: מדבר; Adad 1a: *ṣērū*). This clearly refers to the divine gift of rain. Although Ps 29 does not explicitly mention the rain itself, the imagery of birth in verse 8 alludes to the new green that sprouts in the steppe because of the rain. The concluding verse 9 takes up the motif of labor (by use of the root חיל) and applies it to deer and goats. Terrified by Yahweh's voice, they hasten to give birth to calves and kids, but because the land has been fertilized by the rain, the mother animals will be able to feed themselves and to suckle their offspring.

It is peculiar that Ps 29* refers so prominently to the peripheral region of the steppe where untamed deer and goats live.⁵⁹ Does this indicate that the psalm originated among pastoral nomads roaming such regions? Where would these regions have been located? The topographical designation מדבר קדש is puzzling. The traditional equation with the oasis Kadesh (Num 13:26; 20:1, 22; Deut 1:46; etc.) or Kadesh-Barnea (Num 32:8; Deut 1:2; etc.) in the Negev, where the Israelites settled after their crossing of the Sinai desert,⁶⁰ seems doubtful. The psalm does not clearly refer or allude to the stories of Israel's wandering. In light of the parallel between מדבר קדש in verse 8 and the expression *mdbr qdš* in the Ugaritic text that was subsequently numbered KTU 1.23 (l. 65), Ginsberg located the "*hapax eiremenon*" מדבר קדש in Ps 29:8 "in Syria," "perhaps ... somewhere near Kadesh on the Orontes."⁶¹ This fascinating theory was prominently taken up and confirmed by Dennis Pardee who stated that מדבר קדש,

58. Adad 1a = Daniel Schwemer, *Die Wettergottgestalten Mesopotamiens und Nordsyriens im Zeitalter der Keilschriftkulturen: Materialien und Studien nach den schriftlichen Quellen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), 671–74, own transliteration and transcription.

59. See Pardee, "On Psalm 29," 169, who explains in detail why מדבר here does not mean "'desert,' at least in the commonly accepted English use of the term, but 'uninhabited territory (that is usually fit for pasturing sheep and goats).'"

60. Thus, e.g., Franz Delitzsch, *Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1867), 249; defended by Margulis, "Canaanite Origin," 342.

61. Ginsberg, "Phoenician Hymn," 473; Ginsberg here seems to indicate that the

if correctly vocalized in the Masoretic tradition, can only refer to an area in the vicinity of Qadesh, either the Syrian desert, as Ginsberg thought, to which the Homs Gap provides one of the principal accesses when one is arriving from the coast, or the Beqa Valley, which stretches south from Qadesh on the Orontes, between the Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon chains, and which included relatively wild areas in the Late Bronze Age, particularly on the east and west fringes that reached up towards the mountains on either side. For that matter, if this מִדְבָּר was situated on the north-south axis, it may have included part of the Orontes Valley north of Qadesh.⁶²

On the other hand, *mdbr qdš* in *KTU* 1.23:65 is usually interpreted as “the holy steppe” in recent research, a potential reference to the liminal character of the outback,⁶³ and מִדְבָּר קֹדֶשׁ may in this light likewise be read as “the holy steppe.”⁶⁴ However, it can hardly be excluded that Ps 29:8 originally referred to Qadesh on the Orontes. The end rhyme with אשׁ in the preceding verse 7 might support the Masoretic reading קֹדֶשׁ as going back to the original reading.⁶⁵ Ginsberg combined this topographical interpretation with the theory that Ps 29 was originally a Syro-Canaanite or Phoenician hymn on Baal that had been adapted

idea was first raised by someone else (“as has been suggested”) but does not specify its origins.

62. Pardee, “On Psalm 29,” 169.

63. See, e.g., Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, “Ugaritische Rituale und Beschwörungen,” in *Rituale und Beschwörungen II*, TUAT 2/3 (repr., CD-Rom; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005], 356; Dennis Pardee, “Dawn and Dusk (The Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods),” in *The Context of Scripture I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 282 with n. 65; Mark S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination*, RBS 51 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 116; Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. and ed. Wilfred G.E. Watson, 3rd rev. ed., HdO 1/112 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 520.

64. Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 166, 176; Kratz, “Reste hebräischen Heidentums,” 166; Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 118–19.

65. See also אֵלִוִּית and יַעֲרִוִּת in v. 9a (secondarily continued by כְּבוֹד in v. 9b) and the secondary combination of הָרַעִים in v. 3bα and רִבִּים in v. 3bβ. To be sure, in light of the late attestation of the Masoretic vocalization and the mostly unknown character of vocalization in classical biblical Hebrew, one should not give too much weight to this argument.

by early Israelites for venerating their deity Yahweh in the land.⁶⁶ However, nothing in the text cogently suggests that the tetragrammaton has replaced another divine name or title. If Ps 29* was from the outset composed for the veneration of Yahweh, a location of **מדבר קדש** in the vicinity of Qadesh on the Orontes may even indicate that Yahweh was venerated in this region.⁶⁷ This could give a new twist to the intense debate in which region the cult of Yahweh originated—a debate in which Ps 29 has up to now not played a crucial role.⁶⁸

Psalm 29 shows some further linguistic peculiarities that may point to rather specific tradition-historical backgrounds. The ten cola that can be suspected as having comprised the oldest version of the poem (vv. 3*–5a, 7, 8–9a) contain three words that seem to deviate from their common meaning in biblical Hebrew. The verbal root **חצב** in verse 7 is difficult to explain with the common Hebrew meaning “to cut (stones),” “to hew out (from rock),” or similar. It seems unclear how Yahweh’s voice can be imagined as “hewing out” flames from stones or rocks, which are not mentioned.⁶⁹ Jakob Barth drew attention to a Classical Arabic equivalent meaning “to make to flame, to kindle, to rake up (fire),” which resulted in the entry of **חצב** II in *HALOT* and *DCH*.⁷⁰ The conundrum of the precise meaning of **וַיַּחַשֵּׁף יַעֲרֹת** in verse 9aβ, traditionally understood as “and it stripped forests bare,” has been best solved by Godfrey Rolles Driver who again adduced Classical Arabic equivalents and explained with their help the form **וַיַּחַשֵּׁף**

66. Ginsberg, “Phoenician Hymn,” 472, 475–76; see above, §12.2.

67. See Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum: 2001), 687–90; Oswald Loretz, *Entstehung des Judentums: Ein Paradigmenwechsel*, AOAT 422 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 131. For a critical evaluation of potential other evidence pointing in this direction, particularly some personal names, see, however, Krebern timer, “Beginnings of Yahwism,” 56–65.

68. See for the widely accepted theory of an origin of Yahweh somewhere in the southeast of Palestine, e.g., Martin Leuenberger, “YHWH’s Provenance from the South: A New Evaluation of the Arguments Pro and Contra,” in van Oorschot and Witte, *Origins of Yahwism*, 157–79; for the alternative model of an origin to the north of Palestine, see esp. Henrik Pfeiffer, “The Origin of YHWH and Its Attestation,” in van Oorschot and Witte, *Origins of Yahwism*, 115–44.

69. According to Pardee, “On Psalm 29,” 168, “it appears best to interpret v. 7 as expressing the chipping off of lightning bolts by striking some heavenly substance that would be analogous to earthly flint.” This explanation seems artificial and forced.

70. Jacob Barth, *Wurzeluntersuchungen zum hebräischen und aramäischen Lexikon* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902), 22; *HALOT*, s.v. “**חצב** II”; *DCH*, s.v. “**חצב** II.”

as *hiphil* from a root חשף II, meaning “to cause premature birth, to cause to be brought hastily to birth,” and the noun יערה as onomatopoeic, meaning “bleating kid.”⁷¹ That “bleating kids are brought hastily to birth” “is a likely result of fright and suits the parallel clause.”⁷² To be sure, it is next to impossible to contextualize these cases of a peculiar lexical meaning, which seem mostly unattested elsewhere in biblical Hebrew. Connecting this phenomenon with a potential origin of the psalm somewhere near the Syrian Qadesh is tempting but admittedly remains speculative.

The invocation of Yahweh’s voice is evidently related to the Levantine winter season, which brings thunderstorms and rainfall. In all these regions of rainfed agriculture, survival depends heavily on sufficient rainfall during the winter months. This fact is mirrored in the predominant role of storm gods throughout large areas of Syria and Palestine. The incantatory poetic form of Ps 29*, which seems at the same time echoing the sound of thunder and evoking it, suggests a festive occasion at which the psalm was sung. Although the text does not provide further information on the ritual setting to which the psalm belonged, it seems likely that its original *Sitz im Leben* was related to the beginning of the winter season, more precisely: the New Year’s festival. It is notable that the late addition in the title of the psalm that is attested by the Septuagint refers with the Sukkot festival precisely to the same season. Psalm 29* fits in with various other early poetic pieces in the Psalms for which the same cultic occasion can be assumed.⁷³

12.4.5. The Frame (Psalm 29:1b–2, 3bα, 6, 9b–10)

According to the proposed reconstruction, the original middle part of Ps 29* was secondarily framed and expanded in the following way:

71. The derivation from חשף is supported by the חשפי עוים in 1 Kgs 20:27. See Godfrey Rolles Driver, “Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament II,” *JTS* 32 (1931): 255–56; thus *HALOT*, s.v. “חשף.” יער “forest” is attested elsewhere only with a masc. pl. ending, and the meaning “it stripped forests bare” is no semantic parallel to the first colon of v. 9; the multiple emendations that have been proposed for the first colon are neither necessary nor convincing, see Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 112–13. For יערה as onomatopoeic, see Driver, “Studies in the Vocabulary,” 255–56; thus *HALOT*, s.v. “יערה.”

72. Driver, “Studies in the Vocabulary,” 255.

73. See Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 236–50.

הבו ליהוה בני אלים
 הבו ליהוה כבוד ועז
 הבו ליהוה כבוד שמו
 השתחוו ליהוה בהדרת קדש
 קול יהוה על המים
 אל הכבוד הרעים
 יהוה על מים רבים
 קול יהוה בכח
 קול יהוה בהדר
 קול יהוה שבר ארזים
 וירקידם כמו עגל לבנון
 ושרין כמו בן ראמים
 קול יהוה חצב להבות אש
 קול יהוה יחיל מדבר
 יחיל יהוה מדבר קדש
 קול יהוה יחולל אילות
 ויחשף יערות
 ובהיכלו אמר כבוד
 יהוה למבול ישב
 יהוה מלך לעולם

- 1b Bring to Yahweh, o sons of gods,
 bring to Yahweh honor and strength,
 2 bring to Yahweh the honor of his name,
 worship Yahweh in holy adornment!
 3 The voice of Yahweh is over the waters,
 the god of honor has thundered,
 Yahweh is over great waters!
 4 The voice of Yahweh is full of power,
 the voice of Yahweh is full of majesty!
 5a The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars
 6 and made Lebanon skip like a calf
 and Sirjon like a young wild-ox;
 7 the voice of Yahweh rakes up flames of fire!
 8 The voice of Yahweh makes the steppe go into labor,
 Yahweh makes the steppe of Qadesh / the holy steppe (?) go into labor!
 9 The voice of Yahweh makes deer calve,
 and causes bleating kids to be brought hastily to birth,
 and in his palace is a word of honor / Ayyamur-of-honor (?).⁷⁴
 10 Yahweh took his seat on the flood,
 Yahweh has become king forever!

74. Assuming an erroneous dittography of כלו in the later textual tradition, see below.

The added frame is opened with a fourfold hymnic call addressed to a divine assembly. The four cola are composed as a staircase parallelism—an elaborate poetic form particularly known from Ugaritic poetry.⁷⁵ The speaker of the psalm takes the role of a lord steward who calls the addressed divine beings to pay homage to their king Yahweh. By worshipping Yahweh and prostrating before him, the “sons of gods” demonstrate how great the honor of his divine name is. The Hebrew expression **בני אלים** “sons of gods, divine beings,” found also in Ps 89:7, can be compared with the Ugaritic term *phr bn ilm* “assembly of the sons of gods” in the Baal cycle.⁷⁶ In the first millennium, the Karatepe inscription attests the phrase **כל דר בן אלם** “all the assembly of the sons of gods.”⁷⁷ A further possible parallel is found in the Amman citadel inscription.⁷⁸

The invocations of the divine voice in the middle section of the psalm seem to be interpreted by the added frame as a primeval event when Yahweh established his divine kingship the first time. The retrospection to a primeval time is introduced by the additional second colon of verse 3: **אל הכבוד הרעים** “the god of honor has thundered.” This raises the impression that the following description of the divine voice’s effects on the cosmos concerns an event in a distant past. The primeval perspective is explicitly continued in verse 6:

75. See Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 152 and 154. In the Hebrew Bible, a tetracolon like Ps 29:1b–2 is exceptional. A structurally close parallel could be found in *KTU* 1.12 ii.58–61 according to the translation by Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, “Mythen und Epen in ugaritischer Sprache,” in *Mythen und Epen IV*, TUAT 3/6 (repr., CD-Rom; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005]), 1211–12. However, the reconstruction of the passage is debated, see the rather different interpretation by Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 529. For further formal parallels in the Ugaritic corpus see Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 121 with n. 132.

76. *KTU* 1.4 iii.14. See Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language*, 659. See also Reinhard Müller, “Wo sind deine früheren Hulderweise, Herr?” Tradition als *argumentum ad deum* in Psalm 89,” in *Tradition(en) im alten Israel: Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation*, ed. Ruth Ebach and Martin Leuenberger, FAT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 381.

77. *KAI* 26 iii.19 = Hawkins, *Inscriptions of the Iron Age*, 58 (translation quoted from there).

78. *KAI* 307:6, see Walter E. Aufrecht, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 196 (with literature); Aufrecht himself prefers a different explanation of the fragmentary passage, see p. 189.

וירקידם כמו עגל לבנון
ושרין כמו בן ראמים

(The voice of Yahweh breaks cedars)
and made Lebanon skip like a calf
and Sirjon like a young wild-ox ...

The image added between verses 5a and 7 is notably ambivalent. That Yahweh once made the enormous mountain ranges of Lebanon and Sirjon (the latter of which, according to Deut 3:9, was the Phoenician name of Mount Hermon) skip like a calf and young wild-ox is a beautiful expression of rejoicing (cf. Ps 114:4, 6)—and alludes at the same time to a terrifying earthquake. Based on the Gilgamesh epic (V.133), according to which the fight between Gilgamesh and Humbaba made Sirjon and Lebanon split into two, Andrew George postulated a common Levantine etiological myth, shared by both Ps 29 and the Gilgamesh epic, explaining the origin of the parallel mountain ranges.⁷⁹ The parallelism of Lebanon and Sirjon is found in the Ugaritic poetry as well (e.g., *KTU* 1.4 vi.18–21), which attests to a common poetic tradition. Furthermore, the two mountains also form an iconographic motif that is found in connection with the storm god both in Syrian glyptic and Hittite reliefs.⁸⁰

The final colon of verse 9, which belongs to the framing parts that were probably secondarily added to the middle section, returns to the view on the divine palace. The translation of this colon causes problems due to its somewhat awkward syntax and logic, as indicated by different scholarly attempts of making sense of the line in connection with the rest of the psalm.⁸¹ At first, it seems clear that the term כבוד “honor” resumes the opening parts of the frame (vv. 1b–2), including the second and probably added colon of verse 3 אל הכבוד הרעים “the god of honor has thundered.” Apart from the evident connection between verses 1b–3 and 9b, the precise meaning of verse 9b is debated. The consonantal text attested by the Masoretic tradition ובהיכלו כלו אמר כבוד “and in his palace all of it says: ‘honor.’”⁸² Alter-

79. Andrew R. George, “The Day the Earth Divided: A Geological Aetiology in the Babylonian Gilgameš Epic,” *ZA* 80 (1990): 218–19.

80. See below, §12.6.

81. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat*, 61–62, contains a review of the proposed alternatives.

82. Similarly Kloos's own translation: “and in his palace all cry: glory” (*Yhwh's Combat*, 61).

native interpretations proposed in the scholarly discussion include, for example, “the ‘Honor(-cloud)’ of Yhwh is enthroned” or “in his temple (his) Glory appears.”⁸³

An evident problem in the sentence is connected with the expression כָּלוֹ, translated verbatim “his/its entirety,” “all of him/it.”⁸⁴ It remains unclear what the third person masculine singular suffix refers to. A reference to Yahweh himself, suggested by the preceding suffix in וּבְהִיכָלוֹ “and in *his* palace,” makes little sense since Yahweh’s entirety can hardly have been conceptualized as praising himself.⁸⁵ A reference to the aforementioned divine beings abiding in Yahweh’s palace (vv. 1b–2) would be much more plausible. In fact, the exclamation of the seraphim in Isa 6:3 seems to fit in with this interpretation of Ps 29:9b. The seraphim’s speech is notably introduced with וַאֲמַר “and he (i.e., each of them) said” and it revolves around Yahweh’s כְּבוֹד (כָּבוֹד) מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ “the fullness of all the earth is his honor/glory”). However, compared to Isa 6:3 the phrase in Ps 29:9b וּבְהִיכָלוֹ כָּלוֹ אֲמַר כְּבוֹד seems odd nevertheless, which is not only due to the vagueness of the suffix in כָּלוֹ.⁸⁶ Also the phrase אֲמַר כְּבוֹד reads peculiar, and the notion that the divine beings in Yahweh’s heavenly court are speaking out the single word כְּבוֹד “honor” finds no clear parallel. Furthermore, the conspicuous repetition of the consonantal sequence וּבְהִיכָלוֹ כָּלוֹ may raise the impression of a potential erroneous dittography.⁸⁷ This leads to the question what the original meaning of אֲמַר כְּבוֹד could have been.

וּבְהִיכָלוֹ אֲמַר כְּבוֹד could be understood as “and in his palace is a word of honor,” possibly referring to the honorable instructions that are permanently passed on among the divine hierarchy (cf. אֲמַר in Ps 19:3). To test an alternative that is potentially illuminating, it may be noted that John Day entertained but rejected the possibility of sometimes equating the Hebrew

83. Margulis, “Canaanite Origin,” 332–48; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 155.

84. See Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat*, 61–62 with n. 137 (literature).

85. Pace Henri Cazelles, “Une relecture du psaume xxix?,” in *À la rencontre de Dieu: Mémorial Albert Gelin* (Le Puy: Mappus, 1961); and see Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat*, 61 n. 137.

86. A superficially comparable case is Ps 53:4, which has כָּלוֹ where Ps 14:3, the parallel version of this psalm, has הִכָּל. In this case, however, it is clear what the expression refers to, namely the entirety of the aforementioned human beings (Ps 53:3 // 14:2).

87. Thus BHK. See the discussion by Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat*, 61 with n. 137.

אמר with the Ugaritic Ayyamur (*aymr/ʾayya-mur/* “eject any one!”), the name of one of the two clubs with which Baal slays the sea god Yammu.⁸⁸ Day referred to Umberto Cassuto, who found a possible reference to the weapon in Hab 3:9 in the word אמר, which the Masoretes vocalized as אָמַר “word.”⁸⁹ Such derivation would imply that the consonantal *y* of *ʾayya-mur* in a Hebrew loanword אמר was either elided and therefore not written or mistakenly lost. Thereafter the remaining consonants א, מ, and ר would have been interpreted based on the common root אמר. Admittedly, this assumption is not without problems, although it seems at least theoretically possible.⁹⁰ The fact that אמר is in Hab 3:9 paralleled by קשתך “your bow” may give credence to Cassuto’s suggestion, as well as the reference to the cleaving of the rivers in the same verse. Furthermore, the parallelism of sea and river, featured in Hab 3:8 and following a theophany of the storm god in verses 3–7, is an evident trope of the Ugaritic mythological texts.⁹¹

Day’s rejection of Cassuto’s proposal was based on the fact that such an interpretation would unnecessarily postulate a *hapax legomenon*. However, the word may not necessarily be a *hapax*; as Cassuto pointed out, every occurrence of the root should be investigated against this suggestion.⁹² Deducing אמר from an original reference to a weapon may be plausible in Ps 29:9b as well. Based on the context of the psalm, which alludes to Yahweh’s victory over the waters, a mention of the storm god’s weapon would not be out of place, especially since the weapon is featured

88. Day, *God’s Conflict*, 108. Compare Mark S. Smith, *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*, vol. 1 of *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, VTSup 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 343; and see Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 244 and 675. Pace Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language*, 572, the verbal element *mr* in *aymr* is not to be deduced from a root *mry* but *mrr* I.

89. Umberto Cassuto, “Chapter iii of Habakkuk and the Ras Shamra Texts,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 2:11.

90. The Hebrew interrogative particle אי “where?” which is the equivalent of Ugaritic *iy/ʾēyyV-/* and a cognate of *ay/ʾayyu/*, is always written with the letter י in the Hebrew Bible. This includes the personal names איכבוד “Ichabod” (1 Sam 14:3, written אי כבוד in 1 Sam 4:21), איוב “Job,” and איזבל “Jezebel” (1 Kgs 16:31; etc.). On the other hand, the Ugaritic texts attest for the interrogative adverb *iy/ʾēyyV-/* the variant form *i/ʾē/*, written without consonantal *y* (KTU 1.5 iv.7–8; see Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 171). A Phoenician inscription from Sardinian Tharros (KAI 67) attests the name בעלאזבל which may attest a similar phenomenon compared with איזבל, although the etymology of בעלאזבל is not entirely clear.

91. See below, §12.5.

92. Cassuto, “Chapter iii,” 11.

in both textual and iconographic parallels.⁹³ Therefore, following Cassuto's suggestion for Hab 3:9 and assuming a dittography of בָּלוֹ,⁹⁴ וְבֵהִיכְלוֹ אָמַר בָּבוֹד in Ps 29:9b may be interpreted as "and in his palace (is) the Ayyamur-of-honor / the glorious Ayyamur." To be sure, this explanation remains uncertain and may appear as speculative, but it fits well with the salient importance of the divine weapon in the traditions of ancient Near Eastern storm gods.⁹⁵

Verse 10, which seems to have concluded the original frame, proclaims Yahweh's enthronement as eternal king:

יהוה למבול ישב
יהוה מלך מעולם

Yahweh took his seat on the flood,
Yahweh has become king forever!

The precise meaning of the first colon of this verse, יהוה למבול ישב, is intensely debated, which is mainly due to the question of what the term מבול designates. Since this term is attested elsewhere only in the priestly narration about the flood (Gen 6:17; etc.), the colon is often associated with the primeval deluge.⁹⁶ Since Ugaritic sometimes uses the preposition *l* designating "from," some scholars proposed a temporal connotation of the phrase למבול in the sense of "since the deluge."⁹⁷ However, the combination of the verb ישב "to take seat, to sit" with the preposition ל finds a clear equivalent in the Ugaritic expression *yṯb l*, which means "to sit down on something."⁹⁸ This expression is used in particular when a god or king

93. See below, §§12.5. and 12.6.

94. Alternatively, בָּלוֹ could go back to original בָּלִי "his weapon," by erroneous loss of the letter י, which would result in the translation "and in his palace (is) his weapon: the glorious Ayyamur!"

95. See Joanna Töyräänvuori, "The Weapons of the Storm God in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Traditions," *StOr* 112 (2012): 149–82.

96. E.g., David Toshio Tsumura, "The Deluge (*mabbūl*) in Psalm 29:10," *UF* 20 (1988): 351–55; and Kratz, "Reste hebräischen Heidentums," 166–69, who therefore ascribes vv. 10–11 together to a later *interpretatio israelitica*.

97. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1–50*, AB 16.1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 180; Tsumura, "Deluge," 353–55. For the preposition *l* in Ugaritic, see Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language*, 472–73.

98. E.g., Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 155 n. 43, and see Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language*, 979.

is seated on a throne.⁹⁹ Precisely the same is presupposed in Hebrew in the expressions *יִשְׁבַּת לְכֶסֶּא* “you have sat *on* the throne” in Ps 9:5 and *יִשְׁבוּ לְכֶסֶּא* “they shall sit *on* the throne” in Ps 132:12. Thus, a much more organic interpretation of *יִשְׁבַּת לְכֶסֶּא* seems to be that Yahweh has taken his seat *on* or *upon* the *mabbūl*, which is imagined as his throne. Joachim Begrich convincingly demonstrated that the Hebrew *מָבּוּל* originally designated the heavenly ocean—and not, at least not primarily, the primeval deluge of the priestly narration.¹⁰⁰ The author or authors of the latter certainly borrowed from this original meaning by using the term for the flood that came on the earth “when the fountains of the great deep [תְּהוֹמוֹת רָבָה] burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened” (Gen 7:10–11). The meaning of the term *מָבּוּל* presupposed by this storyline seems to be the heavenly body of waters—the great upper reservoir from which the rain is poured on the earth.¹⁰¹ In all likelihood, this was no purely naturalistic concept, as Kloos pointed out. The fact that according to Ps 29:10a *מָבּוּל* becomes Yahweh’s throne indicates that this passage is related to the ancient Levantine myth of a divine combat against the sea and the waters. In this respect, Ps 29:10a resumes verse 3 which revolves around the sound of Yahweh’s voice “over great waters” (*עַל מֵי־רַבִּים*). In contrast to this allusion to Yahweh’s battle against the waters, Ps 29:10a presupposes that the heavenly waters were subjugated and tamed by Yahweh’s might.¹⁰²

The second colon of verse 10 adds the idea of Yahweh’s everlasting kingship. Otto Kaiser convincingly suggested that the peculiar narrative form *וַיֵּשֶׁב* “and he took his seat,” which awkwardly repeats the verb *יִשְׁבַּת* from the preceding colon, was secondarily added.¹⁰³ As demonstrated above, verse 5b contains a similar marginal gloss.¹⁰⁴ Based on this theory, the remaining three words of verse 10b must be read as *יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ לְעוֹלָם* “Yahweh *has become king* forever!” This wording is a close parallel to the

99. E.g., *KTU* 1.10 iii.13; 1.16 vi.22–23.

100. Joachim Begrich, “MABBŪL: Eine exegetisch-lexikalische Studie,” in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, ed. Walter Zimmerli, TB 21 (München: Kaiser, 1964), 39–54.

101. Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat*, 62–63.

102. On the use of the myth of divine combat in the Hebrew Bible, see Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth*; pace Tsumura, “Deluge.”

103. Otto Kaiser, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Jahwes Gerechtigkeit*, vol. 3 of *Der Gott des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 137 with n. 10.

104. See above, §12.4.3.

proclamation יהוה מלך “Yahweh has become king!” that opens the ancient hymns Ps 93 and Ps 97 (see also Ps 99).¹⁰⁵ In a very similar way, the Ugaritic Baal cycle talks about Baal’s everlasting kingship, in which his victory over the Sea culminates (*KTU* 1.2 iv.10):

*tqh . mlk . lmk .
drkt . dt . drdrk*

Take your everlasting kingship,
your perpetual rule!¹⁰⁶

This mythological perspective, with which the hymnic frame of Ps 29 likewise culminated, supports the theory that the psalm belonged to a certain annual festive occasion celebrating Yahweh’s victory over the chaotic waters. The middle section, which probably contains the oldest part of the psalm, clearly alludes to the autumnal thunderstorms that end the summer drought. The concluding proclamation of Yahweh’s everlasting kingship, which is connected with these meteorological phenomena, fits well with the theory that the psalm was sung at the New Year’s festival.

12.5. The Closest Parallels to the Psalm in the Ugaritic Texts

Ever since their initial discovery, texts from the Ugaritic corpus have been compared extensively using various methodologies with texts of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁷ As with any comparative study, the degree and manner of similarity should first be assessed. In comparison of ancient texts, such as Ps 29 and the Ugaritic texts, it is easy to discover broad similarities on the compositional, semantic, and structural levels that may rise from a shared cultural milieu. The concept of genre or *Gattung* has been devised

105. On the meaning of this proclamation in the myth of Yahweh’s kingship, see Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 77–80.

106. Our translation.

107. See Loren R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 1, AnOr 49 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1972); Loren R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 2, AnOr 50 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975); Stan Rummel, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 3, AnOr 51 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981).

to ease comparison between similar but not identical texts.¹⁰⁸ Genre looks for similarity on the structural level, or family resemblances, which allow for multiple overlaps of similarity but in which no one similarity is necessarily shared by all examples of the genre.¹⁰⁹ On the structural level, it must be admitted that the genres of the psalm and the Ugaritic texts inevitably share characteristics, but what other similarities can be established between them?

The two Ugaritic texts which have the closest affinity to the psalm are arguably the hymn *KTU* 1.101 and a section of the narrative mythic poem of the Baal Cycle in *KTU* 1.4 vii.21–56.¹¹⁰ Translations of the texts are provided in the following:

KTU 1.101

b'l . ytb . k tbt . gr .
hd . [[k]]k mdb . b tk . ġrh . il špn .
b [[ġ]]ġr . tliyt . šb't . brqm
[[.t]]tmnt . iṣr r't . 'š brq . y[ry]
rišh . tply . tly . bn . 'nh
uz'rt . tml . iśdh .
qrn[m] dt . 'lh . rišh . b glt . b šmm
[y]šil . tr<m> . it . ph . ktt . ġbt .[xx]
[xxx]tmkyn . ddm . lbh [. xxx(x)]

Baal sits, like a throne is the mountain,
 Haddu, like the flood in the midst of his mountain, the divine Saphon.
 On the mountain of victory: seven lightnings,
 eight bundles of thunder, a tree of lightning ...
 his head is awesome, dew is between his eyes
 enemies have fallen at the base of his (throne),
 the horn of his head is exalted at the descent (?) from heaven
 ... El (?), the bull; his mouth is like two clouds ...
 ... like wine is the love of his heart ...

The authors argue that Ps 29 has the most common elements with *KTU* 1.101 out of all the Ugaritic texts. There is certainly shared vocabulary

108. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*.

109. David Fishelov, "Genre Theory and Family Resemblance—Revisited," *Poetics* 20 (1991): 131.

110. Translations of the Ugaritic texts are ours.

between them. Some structural similarity may also be detected, although in reversed order, as the Ugaritic text begins with enthronement and the psalm ends in it. What the two texts inarguably do share are motifs or repeated designs forming a pattern of dominant or recurring ideas.

The text *KTU* 1.101 is a hymn celebrating the enthronement of the storm god Baal. This hymn is an important piece of evidence with regard to Baal's enthronement as divine king, as the actual enthronement of the storm god is not narrated in the epic poem of the Baal Cycle, only alluded to. In the description of Baal as king, one finds in lines 6–7 the phrase “his horn is exalted” (*qrn[m] dt 'lh*), resembling קרנו תרום in Ps 89:25.¹¹¹ The horns of Baal are also mentioned in the Baal Cycle in *KTU* 1.3 iv.26–27 (*yb^cr²⁷[rkb . ^cr]pt . qrn^h .*), possibly in reference to lightning in addition to the signature or totemic horned animals connected to the gods.¹¹² Horns are also found in connection with the storm god in the iconographic depictions discussed in the next chapter. The word *mlk* “king” does not feature in *KTU* 1.101, but divine kingship is clearly the theme of the hymn.

The elements that the Ugaritic hymn shares with Ps 29 consist of enthronement, being seated atop a flood, mountains, and lightning, especially the combination of lightning and tree. Both the psalm and the hymn represent what has been dubbed the theophany of the storm god.¹¹³ The similarity between the two texts is thematic, not textual, as not a single line of text is shared between the hymn and the psalm, nor are any specific phrases found in both texts. The phrase יהוה קול “the voice of Yahweh” is repeated seven times in Ps 29, which John Day connected with the phrase “seven lightnings” (*šb^ct brqm*) of the Ugaritic hymn in lines 3b–4.¹¹⁴ The word קול has been interpreted as referring to thunder in multiple biblical passages.¹¹⁵ This motif can be compared with the Ugaritic “holy voice”

111. Nicholas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 2nd ed., BibSem 53 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 389, reconstructed the line *qrn[h] [rm]t 'lh*, which would bring the parallelism to an even sharper focus.

112. Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4*, vol. 2 of *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, VTSup 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 298. The sentence could ostensibly be translated as “The rider of the clouds flashes his horn(s),” but the translation is not certain.

113. On Yahweh's theophany of a storm god, see Müller, *Jahwe als Wettergott*, 237–44.

114. John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSup 265 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 96–97.

115. Anderson, *Book of Psalms*, 1:235; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 247; William Henry

(*qlh qdš*) of Baal in *KTU* 1.4 vii.29, interpreted as meaning thunder. This is relevant with regard to the iconographic depictions of the storm god and the vegetal emanation issuing from his mouth discussed in the following section.

The second Ugaritic text that is relevant when discussing Ps 29 is from the fourth tablet of the six-tablet composition commonly called the Baal Cycle. The Baal Cycle was discovered in 1929–1933 in the so-called Library of the High Priest and is the best-known text from Ugarit bar none.¹¹⁶ According to Kloos, *KTU* 1.4 vii.25–52 is the Ugaritic text with which Ps 29 shares the most similarities.¹¹⁷ The text is translated in the following with a few extra lines for context both at the beginning and in the end:

KTU 1.4 vii.21–56

²¹*šhq . ktr . w ḥss*

²²*yšu [.] gh [.] w yšh*

²³*l rgmt . lk . l ali²⁴yn . b'l .*

tṭbn . b'l²⁵l hwty [.]

yptḥ . ḥ²⁶ln . b bhtn .

urbt²⁷b qrb . hklm [.]

yptḥ²⁸b'l . bdqt [.] 'rpt

²⁹*qlh . qdš [.] b'l [.] ytn*

³⁰*ytny . b'l . š[at .] špth*

³¹*qlh . q[dš .] trr . arš*

³²*šat . [šp]th . ḡrm [.] aḥšn*

³³*rtq . [xxxxxxxx]*

³⁴*qdmym .*

bmt . ar[š]³⁵tṭtn .

ib . b'l . tiḥd³⁶y'rm .

šnu . hd . gpt³⁷ḡr .

w y'n . aliyn³⁸b'l .

Propp, *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background*, HSM 40 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 11; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 96.

116. The *editio princeps* of most of the tablets in the Baal Cycle was published between 1931 and 1938 by Charles Virolleaud.

117. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat*, 37.

ib . hd[[x]]t . lm . thš
³⁹*lm . thš . ntq . dmrn*

⁴⁰*n . b^l . qdm . ydh*
⁴¹*k tğd . arz . b ymnh*
⁴²*bkm . ytb . b^l . l bhth*
⁴³*u mlk . u bl mlk*
⁴⁴*arš . drkt . yštkn*

⁴⁵*dll . al . ilak . l bn* ⁴⁶*ilm . mt .*
⁴⁷*dd l ydd il . ġzr .*
⁴⁸*yqra . mt npšh .*
⁴⁹*ystrn ydd b gngnh .*
⁵⁰*aḥdy . d ym lk . ⁵¹l . ilm .*
⁵²*l ymru ilm . w nšm .*
⁵³*d yšb [] . hmlt . arš .*

gm . l ġ⁵³[l]mh . b^l . k yšh .

⁵⁴*n [gpn] . w ugr . b<n> ġlmt*
⁵⁵*[mm .]ym . bn . zlmt .*
⁵⁶*r [mt . pr⁵]t [.] ibr mnt*

Kothar wa Hasis laughs,
 he lifts his voice and shouts:

Did I not tell you, O mighty Baal,
 (that) you would return, O Baal, to my word?
 He opens an opening in the palace,
 a window in the middle of the temple,
 Baal opens the crack in the clouds.
 Baal gives his holy voice,
 Baal repeats the ut[tering] of his [l]ips.
 His ho[ly] voice makes the land tremble,
 the uttering of his [lips] makes the mountains ... (?)
 ... (?)
 ... ancient,
 the heights of the lan[d] shake.
 The enemies of Baal grasp the woods,
 the haters of Haddu (grasp) the sides of the mountain.

And mighty Baal answers:

O enemies of Haddu, why do you tremble?
 Why do you tremble, hailers of projectiles against the Strong One?

The eyes of Baal guide his hand
 at the shooting of the cedar from his right hand.
 Immediately Baal returns to his house.
 (Is there) even a king, or (is there) not a king,
 (who) can establish a land of dominion?

Let me send a messenger to the son of El, Mot,
 a herald to the beloved of El, the Warrior,
 so that he may proclaim to Mot into his gullet,
 so that he may tell the Beloved into his insides:
 I, alone, (am) the only one who rules over the gods,
 the one who surely fattens the gods and men,
 the one who sate[s] the multitude of the land.

Loudly, Baal shouts to his two la[d]s:

Look, O [Gapan] and Ugar, youthful boys,
 the sea [is covered], in darkness
 t[he lofty peak]s (are covered), the wings(?) of the breeze(?) ...

While this part of the Baal Cycle has often been compared with Ps 29, we view the previous hymn as a closer parallel both in terms of genre and significant shared material. The themes that this narrative poetic text shares with Ps 29 include the lifting of the voice of a divine being, the voice of the storm god, the trembling of the mountains, the tree weapon of the storm god, and a reference to the sea defeated by the god.¹¹⁸

Regarding the compositional level of similarity, there are no shared verses between the texts and no common literary source can be established between Ps 29 and any text in the Ugaritic corpus. Regarding the semantic level of similarity, in a comparative study one must apply some criteria that facilitate comparison, such as assigning a percentage of motifs to significant shared semantic components, the type, manner, or fashion of the shared material, the ordering of this material, or some other heuristic aspects. Most of the words in the psalm are known from Ugaritic literature

118. Regarding the battle between the storm god and the sea, see Töyräänvuori, *Sea and the Combat Myth*.

but do not feature in this particular order in any known Ugaritic text. The use of the vocabulary *is* enough to establish the texts as part of the same cultural sphere, but it does little to establish literary or compositional links between them.¹¹⁹

Studies in which things are compared must inevitably run into the comparability paradox: compared materials must both be diverse in order to be representative but also uniform to facilitate comparison. The simpler a structure is, the easier it is to find correspondences between texts. While poetry abounds in the Ugaritic texts, psalm literature as such is not known. However, *KTU* 1.101 is a hymn, so it is closer in genre to the psalm than the second example that consists of narrative poetry. All three texts discussed in this chapter *are* poetic texts, sharing techniques and tropes of ancient Semitic and particularly northwest Semitic poetry, but that does not mean that they share a genre, or a *Sitz im Leben*.¹²⁰ Since the comparison of texts that represent a similar text type and use a shared vocabulary and grammar is fraught with difficulty, such complications are only compounded when texts are compared with other ancient media. But such comparisons may also offer insights into the texts that cannot be won through mere textual comparisons. In the following, parallels to the poetic texts in Syrian glyptic from the Middle Bronze Age are discussed.

12.6. Iconic Constellations and Symbols of the Storm God in Syrian Glyptic

Iconographic depictions of the storm god are presented on cylinder seals from western Syria, dating to the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BCE).¹²¹ Syrian glyptic was produced in workshops using a visual vocabulary that is repeated in seals of the same geographic and temporal distribution. Seals

119. See also Joanna Töyräänvuori, “Psalm 29 and Methodological Triangulation: What Can Ugaritic Parallels and Iconographic Motifs Add to the Interpretation of a Psalm?,” *BN* 186 (2020): 51–74.

120. The term was coined by Hermann Gunkel in reference to the contexts in which particular literary types or genres originated. A reader must know both the literary form and the social setting in which it was conceived in order to fully understand texts. According to Gunkel, the original *Sitz im Leben* of the psalms was the cult.

121. The dating of seals is largely based on their iconography, as they often do not come from datable contexts. Beatrice Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography in Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals in the Middle Bronze Age*, OBO.SA (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 19.

were not per se meant as a medium for transmitting mythological conceptions, but their use was in the sealing closure of containers and the signing of clay tablets.¹²² The preservation of mythological conceptions is largely an unintended consequence of using this once common visual vocabulary on these seals, but it is fortunate for modern research. It is the high formal and the neat compositional quality of Syrian glyptic¹²³ that makes it a fruitful comparative matrix for Ugaritic and biblical texts.

Many have sought similarity especially in motif between Ps 29 and Ugaritic texts, motif being a *constellation of verbal images*.¹²⁴ The motifs that are present in Ps 29 include:¹²⁵ (1) the voice of the storm god, (2) the god's power breaking cedars and making mountains leap, (3) the enthronement of the storm god over the flood, and (4) a possible reference to the weapon of the storm god. All of these motifs also feature in various Ugaritic texts, including the two texts discussed in this chapter. The intention of this discussion is to test whether motifs in ancient visual media can also be used to supplement these literary motifs.

In Syrian glyptic, the following *iconic constellations* occur: (1) the tree breath of the storm god, (2) the storm god standing on mountains with his tree weapon, and (3) standing and enthroned figurines of the storm god representing the warrior and king aspects of the storm god, respectively. The reading and comparison of images is a difficult task. Even in the

122. Bonnie S. Magness-Gardiner, "The Function of Cylinder Seals in Syrian Palace Archives," in *Aegean Seals, Sealings, and Administration: Proceedings of the NEH-Nickson Conference of the Program of Aegean Scripts and Prehistory of the Department of Classics, University of Texas at Austin, January 11–13, 1989*, ed. Thomas G. Palaima, AEGAEUM 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 62–63. She points out that seals were not commonly used as signatures until the Middle Bronze Age, which is the period to which the seals discussed here are dated.

123. Paolo Matthiae, "Some Notes on the Old Syrian Iconography of the God Yam," in *Natural Phenomena: Their Meaning, Depiction and Description in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Diederik J. W. Meijer (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1992), 169. According to Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography*, 42, the interpretation of iconography is "one [of] the most elusive yet tantalising aspects of the study of glyptic in general."

124. The term is modified from the use of the term *iconic constellation* in Elizabeth Williams-Forte, "The Snake and the Tree in the Iconography and Texts of Syria during the Bronze Age," in *Ancient Seals and the Bible*, ed. Leonard Gorelick and Elizabeth Williams-Forte (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1983), 18–43.

125. This is not an exhaustive list of motifs in the psalm but a selection relevant to this chapter.

same time period different workshops had their own idiosyncratic visual vocabularies that are not always translatable.¹²⁶ The Syrian cylinder seal impressions also sometimes contain visual filler that were inserted for reasons of composition rather than as signifiers, to balance out the different registers in the images.¹²⁷

Even when clear patterns are detected in images originating from a specific area that seem to recall mythological conceptions, the level of reading that can be performed on the images varies.¹²⁸ A straightforward descriptive reading is not always possible, let alone understanding the significance of the images in their cultural contexts.¹²⁹ Sometimes iconographic motifs seem to be used without rhyme or reason, at least insofar as we can tell, containing seemingly confused mythological conceptualizations. But often, it seems, in the representation of the storm god, additional symbolism associated with the storm god was also depicted.

It is this additional symbolism that is relevant to the texts discussed in this chapter. With these cautions in mind, our chapter proceeds to examine the concept of thunder as the voice of god and its depiction in visual media. The vegetal outgrowth emanating from the mouth of the storm god presents a fairly comprehensible visual message, especially when it is combined with textual evidence: a living tree representing lightning.¹³⁰

The storm god's voice is depicted on various seals from Syria-Anatolia as such a vegetal outgrowth emanating from the mouth of the storm god (figs. 1, 2, 3, 9).¹³¹ Elizabeth Williams-Forte made a connection between

126. Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography*, 52. A “workshop” in this context broadly refers to a style. There are four distinct workshops in the Syrian area during this time period.

127. Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography*, 39; Edith Porada, “Why Cylinder Seals? Engraved Cylindrical Seal Stones of the Ancient Near East, Fourth to First Millennium B.C.,” *The Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 573.

128. Matthiae, “Some Notes,” 169.

129. Matthiae, “Some Notes,” 169. Matthiae differentiates between a surface-level reading, a contextual or symbolic-level reading, and a third, iconological level of reading images.

130. See discussion in Töyräänvuori, “Weapons of the Storm God”; Töyräänvuori, “Wings, Weapons, and the Horned Tiara: Iconographic Representation of the Deity of the Mediterranean Sea in the Bronze Age,” *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 1 (2021): 89–128.

131. Elizabeth Williams-Forte, “Symbols of Rain, Lightning, and Thunder in the Art of Anatolia and Syria,” in *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and Its Neigh-*

the lightning-tree, which the weather god is seen brandishing in Syrian iconography, and the “word of tree” (*rgm* ‘š) mentioned in the Ugaritic texts.¹³² In the Baal Cycle, the construction seems to be used as a part of a message formula.¹³³ Williams-Forte suggested that “the word of tree and whisper of stone” may refer to thunder and lightning and thereby to Baal’s weapon.¹³⁴ The branching lightning, the “tree of fire” in the sky is then represented as both the “word of tree” issuing from the mouth of the storm god as well as his vegetal spear weapon (in figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8). It is possible that the tree also manifested as the fire ignited by the voice of the god (fig. 2) or by the striking of his weapon (fig. 9).¹³⁵ The authors suggest that similar imagery is behind the concept of the voice of the Ugaritic Baal and the voice of Yahweh in Ps 29, also explaining why trees are mentioned in all three texts discussed in this chapter.

The discussion around the storm god’s vegetal weapon has been historically polemical due to the serpent seemingly impaled by the weapon in many images, which has given rise to many controversial interpretations.¹³⁶ However, the depiction of the storm god’s weapon as a tree and this tree symbolizing the branching lightning *as such* seems to be a widespread visual message in Syrian glyptic.¹³⁷ It is, in fact, one of the motifs that allow a visual recognition of the storm god in the first place.¹³⁸ The word or voice of the storm god being his thunderous weapon, his word of tree and whisper of stone, seems to present a plausible interpretation of the visual motifs

bors; *Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç*, ed. Machteld J. Mellink, Edith Porada, and Tahsin Özgüç (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1993), 185–90; Williams-Forte, “The Snake and the Tree.” Many more examples of the motif may be found in her articles that have not been reproduced here. See Appendix for the figures discussed in this chapter.

132. Williams-Forte, “Symbols of Rain.” She dubs it the “tree breath” (185).

133. E.g., in *KTU* 1.3 iii.22–23.

134. Williams-Forte, “Symbols of Rain,” 185.

135. Williams-Forte, “The Snake and the Tree.”

136. See criticism of Williams-Forte in Wilfred G. Lambert, “Trees, Snakes and Gods in Ancient Syria and Anatolia,” *BSOAS* 48 (1985): 435–51.

137. See Töyräänvuori, “Weapons of the Storm God.”

138. A visual recognition of the storm god is not always possible, due to the storm god and the plague god Resheph sharing symbolism. See Izak Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Resheph and Baʿal: Late Bronze and Iron Age I Periods (c. 1500–1000 BCE)*, OBO 140 (Fribourg: Presses Universitaires & Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994)

in the framework discussed in this chapter. Likewise, the presentation of the voice and weapon of the storm god as vegetal outgrowths explains why trees are frequently mentioned in texts describing storm gods in the ancient world. It seems as though the connection between the branching lightning and the branched tree that sometimes even caught fire as the result of the former was obvious to the ancients.

If the interpretation of Ps 29:9b suggested above is accepted—according to which the word אֲמַר originally could have referred to the storm god's divine weapon¹³⁹—this is one of the ways in which iconographic depictions may elucidate the interpretation of the psalm. Iconography is not merely a feature of cylinder seals but is found also in other visual media. One such medium that is both temporally and geographically closer to the psalm than Syrian glyptic is a bronze statue discovered at Hazor. In the psalm, Yahweh is seated atop the flood, which, as demonstrated above, clearly echoes his victory over the sea in the context of the combat myth. One of the most interesting pieces of visual evidence in this context is the Hazor bronze statue, which Tallay Ornan identified as representing the enthroned Baal (whom she called the “Levantine storm god”), based on the texts of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle.

Ornan suggests that especially when a divinity that was usually depicted standing was meant to represent the patron deity of a city, the god could be depicted as a seated figure. The patron deities of cities most likely also functioned as monarchic divinities, so this is a sensible conclusion.¹⁴⁰ The 35 cm high, solid bronze statue from Hazor is the largest seated statue known from the preclassical Levant, making it a very important piece of evidence for ancient religious conceptions.¹⁴¹ Ornan dates the statue to the fourteenth century BCE on the basis of the garment worn by the figure, as it matches the clothes worn by Asiatic figures in Egyptian reliefs from the period. If her identification of the statue is correct, it offers us physical evidence for the use of this same mythology in the southern Levant of the Late Bronze Age.¹⁴²

What is relevant to the present discussion is the headdress of the Hazor statue, which contains a tree-like motif flanked on both sides by horned

139. See above, §12.4.5.

140. Tallay Ornan, “‘Let Ba‘al Be Enthroned:’ The Date, Identification, and Function of a Bronze Statue from Hazor,” *JNES* 70 (2011): 253.

141. Ornan, “Let Ba‘al Be Enthroned,” 255.

142. Ornan, “Let Ba‘al Be Enthroned,” 262.

animals (fig. 7).¹⁴³ Ornan interpreted the tree-and-animals motif as representing fertility, fecundity, and abundance of nature. The horned animals on the temples of the god's head flanking the tree-scepter both also refer to the martial power of the storm god. The tree flanked by horned animals is featured in Egyptian iconography on depictions of Asiatic peoples and may have functioned as some kind of identity marker.¹⁴⁴ With regard to the tree symbolizing the divine weapon of the storm god (and thus the storm god himself), the tree motif of the statue has at its center a vegetal staff motif, with the head of the staff possibly symbolizing the lotus flower. Ornan interpreted it as symbolizing abundance and fertility, but in light of the Phoenician vegetal scepters, such as found on the Ahiiram sarcophagus, the connection of the motif to monarchic authority specifically is evident. If the later Phoenician vegetal scepters have a connection to the lightning-tree motif prevalent in Syrian iconography, they also may have functioned as a symbol of the storm god's power, which would be fitting on the headdress of the storm god.¹⁴⁵ The lotus scepter is in the very middle of the headdress, the tree growing around it, as though the scepter formed the very trunk of the tree. If this identification is correct, it offers us a link between the lotus-shaped vegetal staffs of the Phoenician kings of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age and the tree as a symbol of the storm god's divine power,¹⁴⁶ in addition to linking the Ugaritic texts and Ps 29 together on the level of shared motif.

12.7. Conclusions

This chapter has presented a triangulating methodological approach to the study of Ps 29. Two texts from the Ugaritic corpus and iconographic

143. Ornan, "Let Ba'al Be Enthroned," 264–72. Note that while the statue of the god itself is not horned, the crown of the god contains a depiction of two horned animals (on p. 269 Ornan writes that the statue lacks horns, but what the statue actually lacks is *protruding* horns).

144. Ornan, "Let Ba'al Be Enthroned," 262.

145. Ornan, "Let Ba'al Be Enthroned," 264, calls it a flower made of nine petals, although later she also refers to it as a flower of three petals representing a schematized lotus.

146. Ornan, "Let Ba'al Be Enthroned," 265, mentions the motif on the sarcophagus of Byblos's King Ahiiram, where the dead king is depicted with a wilted lotus. In Phoenician iconography the upright lotus symbolized the living king and the wilted lotus the dead king.

representations from Middle Bronze Age Syrian glyptic were used to complement previous interpretations of the contents of the psalm. There are certain features that are shared between the psalm, the Ugaritic poetic texts, and the iconographic depictions. These include the thunderous voice of the storm god, his lightning weapon, the animals (calf and ox) accompanying him, the mountain(s) of the god, and the god's enthronement at the end of the kingship cycle. These motifs are found both in textual and iconographic parallels to the psalm. While Ps 29 may be uniquely enriched by the parallel evidence of the Ugaritic texts and Syrian glyptic, this kind of a triangulating approach using ancient texts and visual representations may be used in the study of other biblical texts as well.

In past research, the insistence that El is the god seated atop the flood and that the standing god must be a younger, more virile warrior divinity has affected and confused readings of Ps 29. Reviewing the textual evidence alone, it would indeed be easy to conclude that the composers of the psalm mixed concepts and divine domains, and, according to some, even did this intentionally to critique or polemicize heathen conceptions, as though Baal was not also seated on the mountain of his victory in the Ugaritic texts. However, all of the verbal motifs found in the psalm find some correspondence in either the Late Bronze Age texts from Ugarit or the Middle Bronze Age cylinder seals from western Syria, or both. In light of the comparative material, it is by no means obvious that Ps 29 blends Baal imagery with traditions of El.

In contrast, Ps 29 provides substantial evidence for the theory that Yahweh was venerated as a Palestinian storm god, very similar to the Ugaritic Baal. While the psalm was likely composed later than the Ugaritic texts and definitely later than the depictions in Syrian glyptic, the enthroned deity mentioned in Ps 29:10 can clearly be interpreted as a Baal-type Levantine storm god regardless of the name used. There is nothing in the concept of a young warrior god becoming the enthroned king of the gods through a feat of conquest that is not supported by both textual and iconographic evidence from the Levant. The king of the gods must be both these things, and so also must Yahweh be in the role of the storm god in the psalm. In the case of Ps 29, the textual and visual evidence complement one another.

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Appendix

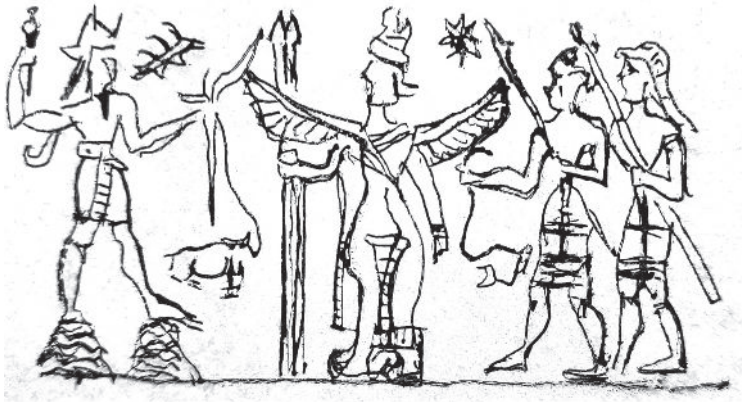


Fig. 1. Cylinder seal impression of a steel-gray hematite seal 22.5 × 12.3 mm in size, dated to ca. 1700 BCE. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "Symbols of Rain," fig. 4 (BM 132824). Storm god (left) standing on two mountain peaks with a vegetal emanation issuing from his mouth, holding a scepter and an ox on a leash opposite the sea god and his two helpers.

Fig. 2. Cylinder seal impression. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "Symbols of Rain," fig. 5. A vegetal emanation issues from the mouth of the storm god. An ox and a calf are leashed to the god.

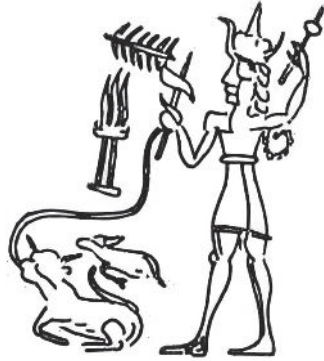


Fig. 3. Cylinder seal impression. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "Symbols of Rain," fig. 3. Storm god (left) with a vegetal emanation coming from his mouth, holding a scepter and a tree weapon, accompanied with what is likely the sea god with a horned tiara and three Egyptian-style ankh-figures that may have represented fish.

Fig. 4. Detail of a cylinder seal impression. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "The Snake and the Tree," fig. 7. Published in Bossert, "Altsyrien," fig. 852, originally from Furlani, "Saggi sulla civiltà," 368. Size 4×2.1 cm. Storm god (right) holding a mace, a serpent, and a tree standard opposite the sea god.





Fig. 5. Detail of a cylinder seal impression of a hematite seal, 27 × 14 mm in size. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "The Snake and the Tree," fig. 9. Originally published by Delaporte, "Catalogue des cylindres," pl. 96, fig. 16 (A.918). Louvre inv. AO 1183. Storm god (middle) holding a tree standard impaling a serpent opposite the sea god, accompanied by the goddess Anat.



Fig. 6. Cylinder seal impression. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, "The Snake and the Tree," fig. 10. Storm god (right) standing on two mountain peaks, holding a tree standard that impales a serpent.

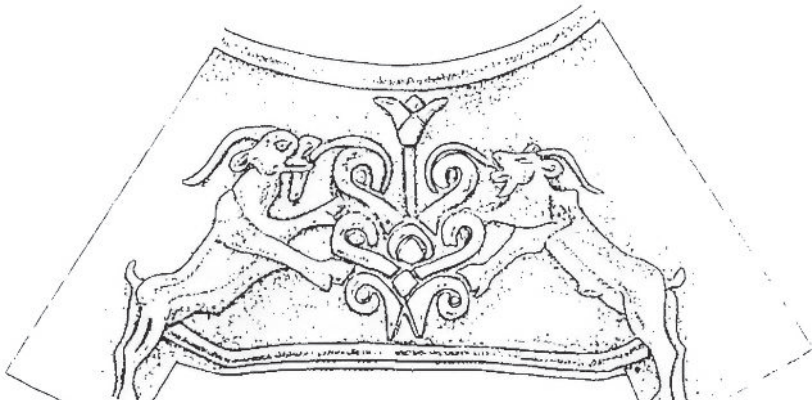


Fig. 7. Detail from a bronze statue from Hazor. Redrawn from Ornan, “Let Ba’al Be Enthroned,” fig. 2b. Two ibexes framing an ornate vegetal staff that has six branches and a three-petal crown.

Fig. 8. Detail of a cylinder seal impression. The Storm god (right) holds his tree-weapon before a figure wearing the shepherd’s hat on top of what seems to be an altar. The tree-weapon has six branches attached to a stem, making it seven-pointed. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, “The Snake and the Tree,” fig. 14. AO 10871.





Fig. 9. Detail from a cylinder seal impression of a hematite seal, 24 × 12 mm in size. El-Safadi, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Glyptik,” fig. 63. Redrawn from Williams-Forte, “Symbols of Rain,” fig. 6. Storm god (left) with vegetal emanation coming from his mouth before an enthroned figure holding a cup and wearing an unhorned shepherd’s cap (see Töyräänvuori, “Psalm 29”). A tree-motif is also visible under the feet of the figure.

Part 3
Practices and Ethics

13

On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Historical Criticism for Life

Michael C. Legaspi

13.1. The Ethical Turn

For much of the last 250 years, biblical studies has been a discipline that aims at historical understanding. It might have been otherwise: the modern study of the Bible might have grown into a discipline along the lines of philosophy, philology, literature, poetics, or even sociology. But it did not. Though the aforementioned disciplines often inform biblical criticism, history, historical research, and historical inquiry have furnished the modern study of the Bible with its essential questions, its basic lines of approach. For this reason, an understanding of the role of historical study remains essential to understanding the academic study of the Bible, what it has been and what it is today. Many, perhaps most scholars are able to teach courses and write books and articles without pausing to consider the intrinsic relation of historical inquiry to biblical scholarship. They take its importance, even its intellectual primacy for granted. But I would like to suggest that it is both appropriate and necessary to reflect on history and the role that it has played in giving biblical studies a distinctive, independent place in the academy. Because the scholar is trained to think and write about the Bible with a certain sensitivity to its historical dimensions, he or she is expected to talk about the Bible in ways that ministers and theologians do not. It is in considering the role of history in biblical studies, then, that we are able to frame larger questions about biblical studies as an academic discipline. For example: To what extent does historical research make the large and internally diverse field of biblical studies a coherent discipline? How does biblical studies relate to other academic

disciplines? What is the relevance of biblical scholarship to people living in pluralistic societies in which biblical literacy is declining? In short, what is the purpose of biblical scholarship today?

History is such a basic, even constitutive element of biblical scholarship that those who want to distinguish it from religiously committed types of biblical study regularly refer to modern criticism as “historical criticism” or the “historical-critical method.” To some, the rationale for this may seem self-evident. The Bible comes down to us from cultures and ancient historical contexts that differ in important ways from our own. Critical reckoning, if it begins anywhere, must begin here. And history has indeed been central to scholarly self-understandings since the discipline of biblical studies was formalized in the late eighteenth century. Today, however, the nature of historical study and the role of historical criticism and historical-critical method in biblical studies are not self-evident. It should be said that the reevaluation of historical criticism now taking place is not, in any radical sense, new. Disputes about history shaped the generation of Lessing and Herder in the Enlightenment period. They formed the background for biblical criticism as it developed in the nineteenth century under the influence of idealism and historicism, and in the twentieth century they framed the scholarly programs of Troeltsch and Albright, Bultmann and Barth, Ebeling, and Childs. Unlike earlier debates, though, present discussions of historical criticism are not, for the most part, being conducted with reference to Christian theological topics such as revelation, inspiration, or the facticity of the exodus or resurrection of Jesus. Contemporary discussions have been stimulated, instead, by social and intellectual currents associated with postmodernism. What I propose to do in this chapter is to examine some recent proposals for understanding the relevance of historical criticism to biblical studies. Traditional historical criticism may be compared to a large, old house that needs to be repaired and updated. Some want to abandon the house and move elsewhere, but others find there to be ample room for work, conversation, and even armed combat. They want to stay, believing that it can still be a solid and attractive disciplinary home once the appropriate improvements and renovations are made. I do not say what ought to be done but only how and in what way these two options are now being considered. My review of scholarly proposals in these two categories is, of course, limited and selective. Unfortunately, I have left a good number of things out of account. The review is also limited in its ambition. It is not the basis for a grand proposal on my part, a program for untying the Gordian knot into

which arguments for and against historical criticism are presently interwoven. I will, however, venture the observation that we have arrived at an important juncture in the development of the discipline—one that I will call an “ethical turn” in biblical studies, a turn that is being enacted *both* by opponents and defenders of historical criticism. What this turn involves is not a turn *away from* history *to* ethics but rather a return to an older position by which historical study is understood to serve certain social, moral, and ethical objectives. Whereas classic historical criticism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was conceived as a scientific enterprise aimed at the elucidation of the Bible’s embeddedness in the human past, contemporary historical criticism is organized by ethical and political imperatives directed toward public virtue. To make this case, I will draw, as people typically do, on the history of biblical interpretation. But unlike the scholars whom I will discuss, I do not think it is useful to posit a unitary history of modern criticism and then argue on this basis that we should take our bearings from one essential period in that history (for example, Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, etc.). Instead, I believe it is better to speak of multiple versions of modern criticism with distinctive points of origin, separate programs, and different trajectories. We are not dealing with the evolution of one species but of several. They overlap at times, but they also diverge and coexist side by side. We need not measure varieties of modern biblical interpretation by their relation to a single entity that we mark as modern criticism. To speak of an ethical turn, then, is merely to mark the resurgence of one type of modern criticism, one attitude toward history, and the relative eclipse of others.

13.2. Criticizing Historical Criticism

First, a brief word about some of the difficulties presently facing historical criticism. Historical criticism has become a contested enterprise for a variety of reasons that are, by now, familiar to scholars working within the discipline. The first is skepticism concerning the ability of scholars to produce objective accounts of past figures and events and to describe things as they really were: in Ranke’s famous phrase, *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. The objection is philosophical in that it asserts that all knowledge is perspectival and that no claim about the past is free of bias or presupposition. What purports to be an objective enterprise cannot really be so; what seems like disinterested knowledge is inevitably skewed by the investigator’s aims and interests. The objection is also empirical. After over two

hundred years of historical-critical study of the Bible, consensus on many important questions remains elusive. Other complaints have to do with the failure of historical criticism to reckon appropriately with the Bible's enduring cultural, political, and religious significance (or lack thereof). To be sure, historical criticism has played a role, or many roles, in establishing political arrangements, negotiating cultural settlements, and adjudicating theological debates throughout the modern period. But historical criticism can also be narrow, specialized, and antiquarian. Critics often find it difficult to pass from a carefully argued description of the biblical past to a compelling prescription of how the Bible ought to be appropriated or not appropriated today. As Max Weber said in his lecture on science as a vocation, the attempt to derive cultural norms from a study of the past would not be scholarship but prophecy. And yet it is precisely the role of the Bible in shaping culture and religion that makes it significant—not its obvious embeddedness in the human past. Thus, historical critics who prefer to stay within the limits of their scientific training as Weber recommended are sometimes accused of quietism, indifference, and a kind of blinkered scholasticism. The questions, then, concern both the possibility and the desirability of historical criticism.

In examining responses to this state of affairs, it is appropriate, I think, to turn first to a paper that was presented in Finland to members of the Finnish Exegetical Society in Helsinki. In February of 2007, David Clines of Sheffield asked whether historical criticism was approaching its demise.¹ He asked pointedly whether its days are numbered. And just as pointedly, he answered “no” to his own question. If one defines historical criticism broadly to include textual criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and social-scientific criticism, then, Clines argues, historical criticism remains a popular and vibrant enterprise. To judge from sessions at the Society of Biblical Literature and the publication of books and articles, scholars continue to work actively and fruitfully in these areas. The suspicion of sickness or an underlying morbidity arises, however, when one begins to examine scholarly attitudes that lie behind this work. Clines distinguishes between the nature of historical criticism, which he identifies with the nonpartisan, rational deployment of historical scholarship, and the actual practice of historical criticism, which he says has been problem-

1. David J. A. Clines, “Historical Criticism: Are Its Days Numbered?” *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 6 (2009): 542–58.

atic.² In carrying out their work, historical critics have behaved arrogantly. According to Clines, they act as though the only worthwhile questions are historical and as though the answers to such questions form the indispensable basis for biblical scholarship as a whole, even when the critics themselves fail to provide a consensus on which further scholarship should be based. They fall prey to the genetic fallacy and overstate the importance of origins; they fail to consider the limitations and contingency of historical understanding. The sharpest criticism of historical-critical practice is the charge that, by focusing on sources and origins, historical critics distract themselves from larger, more difficult questions having to do with the wider, thematic scope of biblical literature. What makes this last criticism even more interesting is that, in this essay, Clines seems to have distracted himself from a big question: Why pursue historical criticism at all? His distinction between the nature of criticism and the practice of criticism allows him to defend its intellectual legitimacy, but it falls short as a positive explanation of why its basic aims remain necessary today. When faced with the proliferation of nonhistorical criticisms, Clines says simply that historians should continue to do what they are good at while others should do what interests them, even if new projects ignore historical criticism altogether. He suggests that the discipline be a space where “a thousand flowers [can] blossom.”³ Diversity, he suggests, is good: old-fashioned historical critics can keep their day jobs while younger scholars can feel free to move beyond historical criticism and “make connections that will benefit them and the discipline as a whole.”⁴ The sentiment is a generous one, but, in my view, it fails to take the intellectual stakes seriously. Scholars must make choices about what to study and to what end; it would be good, on the whole, if decisions were based on argument and conviction rather than age and personal preference. Given the traditional centrality of historical study to modern scholarship and the radical questions being put to this mode of scholarship, Clines’s blithe methodological pluralism comes across as a facile, even complacent endorsement of an unstable status quo. Add to the house, if necessary, but there is no need to repair it.

John Barton, I think, offers a more substantive and constructive response to problems facing historical criticism. Whereas Clines points merely to bad historical-critical practices, Barton’s focus is on the nature

2. Clines, “Historical Criticism,” 544.

3. Clines, “Historical Criticism,” 558.

4. Clines, “Historical Criticism,” 558.

of biblical criticism itself.⁵ But, like Clines, Barton has a conservative aim: to argue that biblical criticism is not “bankrupt,” that it is “not dead yet,” and that “it should survive and prosper.”⁶ Barton sees attacks on criticism from two fronts, from theologically minded readers who complain that historical-critical scholarship is narrow and antagonistic and from those who believe that historical objectivity is impossible and undesirable. To parry these attacks, Barton argues that biblical criticism is not fundamentally about history at all. It is a literary operation designed to ascertain the plain meaning of the biblical text, which critics pursue by bracketing questions of ultimate truth and attending most of all to semantics and genre. The essence of the entire enterprise is disarmingly simple and appealingly universal. The goal of biblical criticism is to understand texts. As Barton puts it: “There are two stages involved in understanding a text. One must establish what it means; one may then ask whether what it means is true. This is an elementary point, which in reading texts other than the Bible almost everyone takes for granted.”⁷ That is, the biblical critic aims at something that Barton calls “textual meaning.”⁸ Knowledge of history and the ability to reconstruct it may indeed prove helpful or relevant to the discernment of textual meaning, but such knowledge is not in itself the goal of criticism. Textual meaning, then, is the goal; it is for Barton the object of a standard, noncontroversial intellectual operation. It is only in the second step, in evaluating whether the meaning is true or true for today, that the critic enters the political arena. Barton’s recourse to a basic, commonsensical conception of biblical criticism is appealing. It provides methodological common ground while leaving room for a variety of assessments of biblical literature. I suspect, however, that Barton redescribes biblical criticism in the way that he does in order to defend the disciplinary status quo. Clines wants to let a thousand flowers bloom, but Barton wants to be sure that theological conservatives and postmodern critics do not dismantle the garden in the process. What gives this away is Barton’s attempt to tie his model to the Renaissance when, he says somewhat puzzlingly, humanists sought out the “pristine meanings” of classical

5. John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

6. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 7.

7. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 171.

8. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 68.

and biblical texts.⁹ Humanists, of course, were not apolitical; they sought to weaken the hold of scholasticism or of confessional orthodoxies on political establishments in the name of an irenic political theology—Valla, Erasmus, Scaliger, and Grotius come immediately to mind. The real value of making the Renaissance foundational is to avoid the cultural baggage of Protestantism's hostility to authority and the Enlightenment's commitment to rationalism and statism. According to Barton, biblical criticism cannot be identified with and cannot be held responsible for theological and philosophical programs that took hold later; it thus avoids criticisms now directed toward the reductive, pseudo-scientific, elitist, misogynistic, hegemonic character of biblical studies. By invoking Renaissance humanism, Barton seeks to make a more or less objective form of criticism the indispensable core of the discipline.

Despite Barton's reassurances, I do not think that a fuller account of the history of biblical scholarship bears out his thesis. Humanism, both before and after the Reformation, was not a quest for pristine meanings. Nor do I think that one can explain the trajectory of mainstream modern scholarship without acknowledging the legacy of Luther and German Pietism, on the one hand, and the rise of the modern university during the latter period of the Enlightenment, on the other. These developments were not epiphenomenal but essential to the discipline as it developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The search for textual meaning was never pristine, and it is not so today.

Also relevant here is Barton's description of biblical criticism as a two-stage process involving first the meaning of biblical texts and, secondly, an evaluation of this meaning. As a leading voice in feminist biblical scholarship, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argued years ago that, as long as historical critics pretend to be neutral, scientific, objective, and value-free, they will succeed only in masking the male-centeredness of existing scholarly discourse and in fooling themselves into thinking that they are impartial investigators when, in fact, their work is based on certain cultural assumptions.¹⁰ To redress these failures, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, the language and intellectual frameworks of biblical scholarship

9. Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 124.

10. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, BSNA 10 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 43–63.

must be reconceptualized so that women and women's experience are not merely examples of the Other in stories of men but subjects of intellectual inquiry in their own right.¹¹ Especially relevant here, though, is Schüssler Fiorenza's recommendation about historical criticism itself. Shorn of its scientific, positivistic aspirations, historical criticism remains a useful, even indispensable tool by which to defeat and overcome androcentrism; as she says, "we need to use the methods and means of historical-critical scholarship while at the same time scrutinizing and contesting its androcentric philosophical-theological presuppositions, perspectives, and goals."¹² In this way, historical method allows scholars to overcome the historical fact that ancient authors silenced and excluded women. It is constructive as long as practitioners remain aware of the contemporary fact that traditional scholarship is and has been a patriarchal enterprise. In other words, keep the method; rethink the goal. I would like to suggest that, in commending historical-critical method in this way, Schüssler Fiorenza endorses a bifurcated, two-stage outline of criticism that is similar both to Clines's distinction between nature and practice and to Barton's separation of meaning and truth. More recently, however, feminist scholars have argued that historical criticism cannot be so divided and must therefore be set aside.¹³ According to Susanne Scholz, it is a unitary operation that is, to a great extent, determined by the past that it seeks to recover. Even when applied to the Bible by feminist scholars like Phyllis Bird, historical criticism succeeds only in replicating the patriarchal norms of the biblical authors. The past cannot be rehabilitated. What is needed is a mode of scholarship focused on the present, a form of cultural studies that explores "how biblical meanings are constructed" by lay readers "in a wide range of reading communities across time and space."¹⁴ Instead of the past, the present; instead of history, sociology. Jorunn Økland argues for a similar rejection of history.¹⁵ She states that, as a

11. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 55–56.

12. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 55.

13. Susanne Scholz, "'Tandoori Reindeer' and the Limitations of Historical Criticism," in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, GPBS 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 47–69.

14. Scholz, "Tandoori Reindeer," 63. The point about "ordinary readers" is made on p. 64.

15. Jorunn Økland, "The Power of Canonised Motifs: The Chance for Biblical Studies in a Secular, Canonically Illiterate World?," in *Present and Future of Biblical*

discipline, biblical studies is dependent upon public interest in the Bible; fewer and fewer people know the Bible or care how it came to be; therefore, scholars should move away from historical-critical explanations of texts that no one knows to constructive explorations of cultural motifs that are found in the Bible and in a broad array of canonized literatures.¹⁶ For both Scholz and Økland, then, the issue with historical criticism is not a poorly applied method but a method that has become useless in the light of contemporary social realities.

13.3. Reimagining Historical Criticism

So far, I have examined proposals that respond to the troubled state of historical criticism by maintaining a methodologically conflicted status quo (Clines), relegating history to an auxiliary status (Barton), and abandoning history in favor of cultural studies (Scholz, Økland). Though there is much to learn from these proposals, they do not explore the possibility that historical criticism might retain a *principled* centrality within the discipline. I believe that a full reckoning with the state of historical criticism today requires attention both to those who want to leave it aside and those who want to retain it in at least some form. In this second part of the chapter, I will look at some recent attempts to reform historical criticism by undertaking a criticism of criticism that ultimately preserves historical criticism and defends its legitimacy. In what follows, I will draw on recent works by Chip Dobbs-Allsopp, Martti Nissinen, Ron Hendel, and John Collins, highly accomplished historical critics who have written articulate discussions of method.¹⁷ In doing so, I will discuss three features of proposals to rehabilitate and retain historical criticism: (1) the need to learn from and absorb postmodern critiques of modernist epistemologies; (2) a desire to

Studies: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Brill's Biblical Interpretation, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew, *BibInt* 161 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 216–39.

16. Økland, “Power of Canonised Motifs,” 234–35.

17. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” *BibInt* 7 (1999): 235–71; Martti Nissinen, “Reflections on the ‘Historical-Critical’ Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, *RBS* 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 479–504; Ronald Hendel, “Mind the Gap: Modern and Postmodern in Biblical Studies,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 422–43; John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

rehabilitate the legacy of the Enlightenment; and (3) an insistence on the value of historical criticism for maintaining the integrity of the discipline.

13.3.1. Epistemology

Within the context of biblical studies, the word *postmodernism* is a term of convenience for a set of diverse intellectual attitudes. Most relevant here is an attitude of suspicion or mistrust toward those who claim access to objective knowledge, universal reason, or some final, noncontingent metaphysical truth. To judge from my sampling, contemporary historical critics are happy to join postmodernists in denying that these things are accessible to us. As full-blooded historicists, our nineteenth-century forebears may have trusted rational, historical science to deliver truths about the texts and contexts of the Bible, truths with profound metaphysical implications. But we are different. We have learned from Nietzsche that knowledge is perspectival, from Freud that reason is impure, from Wittgenstein that language is inseparable from particular ways of life, from Gadamer that one always begins from a specific place of understanding, from Foucault that power is everywhere, from poststructuralists that our constructions of reality are unstable and provisional. And so on. It makes sense, therefore, that, by today's lights, the quest for historical understanding should be seen, not as a progressively clearer documentation of what was real and factual in an actual past, but rather as an attempt to offer a narrative that may be judged plausible or compelling within certain regimes of truth. There are different ways of describing how biblical scholarship has transitioned itself from older conceptions of history to new ones chastened by postmodern theories of knowledge. It is worth noting that the transition has been a long and difficult one, especially when compared to other humanistic disciplines. A reason for this is that once academic biblical criticism ceased to be the handmaiden of theology in the eighteenth century, it became the handmaiden of history in the nineteenth. The rise of history in biblical studies was aided by advances in archaeology and comparative philology and the application of sociological models to ancient Israel and early Christian movements, developments which continue today. Nevertheless, the task of reconfiguring or retheorizing historical study, even when it appears to be thriving, is still an urgent and important one.

Ron Hendel speaks about postmodernism with a modern accent. Canvassing the theoretical literature, he offers a clear exposition of postmodern

critiques of Western rationality. On this basis, he adopts Seyla Benhabib's distinction between a weak version of postmodernism and a strong one, accepting the former as valid while rejecting the latter. In accepting a weak version, Hendel concedes that human reason does not grant access to some larger metaphysical reality or transcendental foundation; instead, reason is embedded in culture and society, entangled with power, embodied in practical life, and engaged politically.¹⁸ But, he asserts, it goes too far to say that we can dispense with reason. Though limited, it is all that we have, and, moreover, it is what allows us to challenge and correct the applications of reason in the first place. This is what criticism fundamentally is. This limited, practical view of reason accords with Hendel's view that the individual human subject, though entangled, nevertheless retains a meaningful agency to think and act; though the subject never fulfills the dream of perfect knowledge, the individual still has the means to pursue useful knowledge within the bounds of a limited, self-correcting scholarly discourse.¹⁹ When applied to history, this epistemology yields a new way of doing history, something between the older, high modern *Altertumswissenschaft* and the newer, postmodern historical theory (Foucault's localized, thematic microhistories). Nissinen provides a useful and clever name for it: in order to avoid the cultural baggage of the term, he turns historical criticism into *critical historicism*. For the critical historicist, then, the essential question cannot be "what really happened but what kind of *secondary* reconstructions of the past are enabled by the *primary* reconstructions of the past, that is, the available set of sources."²⁰ The scholar acknowledges that the past is, in some sense, real, but he or she abandons what Nissinen calls a "naïve referentialism."²¹ The goal is not to report what happened but to interpret cultural signs plausibly and responsibly. The result, then, is not a scientific construction but a self-conscious hermeneutical *reconstruction* of available sources.

This description of the historical task accords nicely with the form of historicism commended by Dobbs-Allsopp. Taking cues from literary studies, Dobbs-Allsopp retains a focus on literature, somewhat like Barton, but he seeks explicitly to rid criticism of lingering commitments to foundationalism and positivism. Like the others, he denies access to

18. Hendel, "Mind the Gap," 426.

19. Hendel, "Mind the Gap," 430.

20. Nissinen, "Reflections," 488.

21. Nissinen, "Reflections," 492.

metaphysical backgrounds and brute historical fact. The historian is not a floating mirror who passively reflects a past that is really there. The historian is situated, and his or her perspective is contingent. But, in acknowledging this, Dobbs-Allsopp warns against the “lure of [a] radical historicism” that totally denies our ability to make valid statements about the historical past, statements that are free from a fatal distortion.²² In his view, such a radical, totalizing critique ignores the fact that there are nonpositivistic, nonfoundational ways to test the validity of a historical interpretation. Drawing on the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism, Dobbs-Allsopp claims that validity may be determined by usefulness, that is, by what effects a statement has in the world; thus, “the truth of past knowledge [may] be continually tested by present experience.”²³ Following Hillary Putnam, he argues that pragmatism does not entail relativism and is, in fact, compatible with a functional acknowledgment of objective physical and historical reality, provided this modified realism does not become a metaphysical doctrine. In these ways, historical critics have charted a new path for historical study, one that befits the epistemological modesty and self-awareness of contemporary culture. Whether seen as an extension of pragmatism, critical historicism, or weak postmodernism, the new approach is part of a philosophically explicit effort to show that historical criticism is not only legitimate but also, when understood properly, a practical foundation on which many useful things can be constructed.

13.3.2. Enlightenment

In defending historical criticism, some have argued for a return to the legacy of the Enlightenment. This is not surprising, as methodological debates regularly involve appeals to the history of scholarship. If a prevailing method is to be refined or rejected, an understanding of the history of the method can clarify what is at stake and help practitioners decide whether present conditions have made the method unsuitable in some way. To consider briefly just one example, the French Oratorian Richard Simon argued in the latter part of the seventeenth century for a new approach to the study of the Bible. A pressing issue at the time was the growing influence of Spinoza and the fear that Spinoza, in undertaking

22. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 262.

23. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 269.

historical criticism of the Bible, had opened a new and dangerous way for skeptics to undermine the authority of Christian churches and governments. In response, Simon argued for a strict separation between biblical criticism, a technical enterprise oriented toward textual and lexicographic matters, and biblical interpretation, a theological task overseen by the magisterium of the church. In doing so, he portrayed himself as a biblical critic in the tradition of Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and recent Catholic humanists like Cardinal Cajetan (Tommaso di Vio) and Jacques Bonfrère (not to mention his older, fellow Oratorian Jean Morin). If criticism had served the needs of the church in confronting Jews and Protestants in the past, it could be used once again to defeat the dangerous atheism of Spinoza. By telling a certain story about biblical criticism, Simon argued that it was theologically legitimate and politically necessary.

In a similar way, contemporary scholars are turning to the Enlightenment to defend the legitimacy and necessity of historical criticism. The questions, then, are: What is to be gained by retrieving the legacy of the Enlightenment today? What are the constraints and motivations for this retrieval? For Simon, the constraint was the Tridentine prohibition against private biblical interpretation, and the aim was to bring biblical criticism under proper methodological control in responsible pursuit of the literal sense. As we have seen, the constraint today seems to be a prohibition against dogmatism of all varieties—theological, positivistic, historicistic. But what is the aim? For Collins, to hearken back to the Enlightenment is to recover the intellectual outlines of an approach to the Bible that accords with secular culture. Collins identifies this approach with three specific methodological principles that he draws from Van Harvey and Ernst Troeltsch. The first principle is the principle of autonomy. In keeping with Kant's command to "dare to know," the historian refuses to allow tradition or authority to determine his or her scholarly judgments. Quoting R. G. Collingwood, Collins says that the historian is his own authority.²⁴ What the Enlightenment authorizes in this instance is the dignity of individual thought and, as Collins says, the freedom to contravene received opinion. But critical autonomy in the Enlightenment mode is not a freedom to express oneself. It is rather the precondition for the performance of a particular rational duty. Thus, the second principle—the principle of analogy—specifies this duty; it directs the individual to make sense of the Bible

24. Collins, *Bible after Babel*, 5.

within the framework of present-day experience. Biblical writings must be analyzed and explained in terms of scientific laws, social realities, and psychological motivations that we ordinarily use to account for phenomena. There can be no special pleading and no appeal to private revelations, arcane reasonings, or occult forces that are not consistent with things that we can observe and document today. The past must be understood, and it must be understood by analogy with the present. The third principle is identified differently in two works by Collins. In *Bible after Babel*, Collins speaks of a “principle of criticism,” which stipulates that no individual ever arrives at a final truth in scholarly work.²⁵ All conclusions are provisional such that no finding, no theory, no discovery is ever established beyond doubt or question. Everything, including criticism, remains subject to further criticism. In a recent essay, however, Collins lists the third principle as the principle of correlation.²⁶ According to this principle, events are bound together in networks of cause and effect. Nothing stands outside the flow of history. Everything has both antecedents and consequences; the task of the historian is to explain the ways in which the object of understanding is embedded in a closed system, conditioned by its particular time and place.

If we take both of these into account, then Collins gives us not three but four Enlightenment principles. In my judgment, the principles of autonomy, analogy, and correlation correspond well to forms of historiography and critical inquiry that emerged in the mid- to late eighteenth century in the work of figures such as Semler, Michaelis, Eichhorn, and Lessing. The principle of criticism, though perhaps adumbrated in the perspectivalism of someone like Chladenius, seems less like a principle and more like a gesture toward Collins’s own morality of knowledge, according to which doubt and uncertainty are virtuous and intellectual certainty is dangerous.²⁷ In presenting these principles, Collins suggests that they are indispensable. He challenges opponents of historical criticism to imagine a mode of analysis that does *not* proceed along these lines. He asks them, in effect, to consider how useful these principles really are and how bad it would be if autonomy were replaced by traditionalism, analogy by super-

25. Collins, *Bible after Babel*, 6.

26. John J. Collins, “Historical-Critical Methods,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament*, ed. Steven B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 135–36.

27. See Michael C. Legaspi, “What Ever Happened to Historical Criticism?,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007): 1–21.

naturalism, and correlation by historical exceptionalism. The discipline would splinter into various retrograde confessionalisms. Collins's message, then, is that the critical study of the Bible, which came to full flower in the Enlightenment, has yielded a form of inquiry that should not be lightly abandoned. To the extent that we recognize the positive contribution of Enlightenment thought to contemporary scholarship, we ought to identify as well with its use of historical inquiry to handle cultural materials. In other humanistic disciplines, the Enlightenment may stand for hegemonic power and totalizing discourse masquerading as reason and equality. But for Collins, it stands for a different kind of power: the power to appropriate the Bible on one's own terms, without having to answer to Christian tradition, popular pieties, or churchly authority.

13.3.3. The Integrity of the Discipline

The third argument for retaining historical criticism has to do with its centrality to the academic discipline. The claim is that historical criticism is valuable because it gives the discipline of biblical studies coherence. But if it does not do so through the common goal of established historical truths, then how *does* it do this? In the current climate, the benefits of historical criticism are seen in a particular light. Its benefits are not cognitive, identified with the achievement of a mental state like certainty or belief (in a strong sense); nor are they scientific in the sense of contributing to the steady accumulation of objective knowledge. Taking a cue once again from pragmatism, defenders of historical criticism look to the effects that it has in the world. In doing so, they identify two kinds of positive effects: procedural benefits and ethical goods. It is not surprising that Collins, who understands historical criticism in terms of methodological principles, argues that it has been vindicated by its usefulness in structuring academic inquiry. Historical criticism provides, in a manner of speaking, the rules of the game. Collins states that historical criticism has created an "arena where people with different faith commitments can work together and have meaningful conversations." It does so by providing rules, setting limits on what can be said, and directing practitioners toward "what a given text could or could not mean in the ancient context."²⁸ Scholarship must be about something. If the "something" is an investigation of ancient

28. Collins, *Bible after Babel*, 10.

context that is independent of faith commitments and traditions, then scholars of differing backgrounds can work together on a common intellectual project. But returning again to pragmatism, what is a provisional reconstruction of the Bible's ancient context for? What does it achieve? What good does it do?

I would like to suggest here that, according to its contemporary defenders, historical criticism's greatest contribution is not intellectual but moral. Looking back on the history of criticism, I believe that moral self-understanding has always been important. Historical criticism, over the course of its development in the modern period, has furnished scholars with a specific virtue-ethical ideal. An old version of this ideal, going back to Erasmus, Grotius, Scaliger and the Republic of Letters, was that of the sensible, fair-minded humanist who stands above the confessional fray and whose philological erudition lights the way to a broad and flexible Christian consensus. A tone of superiority and impatience creeps in in the early Enlightenment, when biblical critics like Spinoza and Jean LeClerc seized the moral and intellectual high ground in their criticisms of confessional interpretation. With the development of the more practical, conservative phase of Enlightenment carried forward by German academics, the ideal shifted to include diligence (*Fleiß*), thoroughness (*Gründlichkeit*), and the discipline aimed to understand ancient authors profoundly and sympathetically, on their own terms. In the nineteenth century, this quest for the truth was framed in Romantic terms. To speak of scholars as Romantics in this context is to indicate something significant about their pursuit of knowledge. In opposition to the pragmatic organization of faculties at the Enlightenment university, Romantics insisted on a metaphysical unity of the world, accessible through historical inquiry. To educate was not a matter of providing vocational training in law or medicine, with some civics and ethics thrown in, but rather of initiating the whole person into the profound totality of human life in its philosophical, moral, and aesthetic dimensions. This unity provided philosophical justification for the increasingly specialized work of science-minded biblical scholars: to study one thing in its original organic unity was to touch the whole. To engage the literality of the Bible with rigor and creativity was to work oneself into the great human truth hovering, somewhere, behind or above the text. Thus, textual criticism dealt with the text, but it was really *about* the vicissitudes of history. Source criticism dealt with literary seams and characteristic vocabulary, but it was really *about* fundamental questions of power and authority. Form criticism dealt with embedded traditions

and etiologies, but it was really *about* the evolution of human religious consciousness. The professor, on this model, is not a pedant but a kind of philosophical hero digging beneath layers of accumulated tradition to recover the truth and humanity of the Bible.

Turning to the contemporary situation, I believe that scholarly self-image and ethical aspiration remain crucially important. Contemporary historical critics may not be historians in the old, scientific sense, but they are definitely critics. To the extent that they use objective criteria to determine what can and cannot be said, what does and does not count as a useful and constructive analysis, they are vitally interested in protecting the integrity of interpretive discourse. To a significant degree, historical critics accept the legitimacy of ideological criticism, reader response theory, and advocacy readings that highlight the subjectivity, political identity, and social aims of the interpreter. Though they accept that no scholarly enterprise is, in this sense, innocent, they identify historical criticism with a qualified objectivity that prevents scholarship from becoming an arbitrary discourse in which anything goes, one in which everything begins and ends in the realm of opinion. Both Dobbs-Allsopp and Hendel argue that, even though perfect objectivity is impossible, we are not therefore left with a crippling indeterminacy. It goes too far to say that there are no standards for scholarly discourse. There are standards because there is a reality against which to test scholarly arguments. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that texts and the historical realities that gave rise to them were “not constituted by the human mind.” The text has a “reality independent of the critic,” and history has a “substantiality” that confronts the historian.²⁹ Scholarship interprets reality; it does not remake it. Hendel, for his part, puts forward truth and truthfulness as scholarly ideals. One does not have to be foundationalist to believe in the importance of truthfulness.³⁰ Hendel accepts that scholarship is political, but he denies that it is *only* political, that is, that only politics remains. Postmodernism sets up a false choice between a false, unattainable objectivity that pretends to be politically neutral and a politically enacted subjectivity that uses scholarly discourse merely to pursue social objectives (what we might call, using American terminology, “woke philology”). Hendel believes that there

29. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 265.

30. Hendel, “Mind the Gap,” 432–34.

is in fact a third option: to honor the historical givenness of a text by evaluating all claims, whether politically good or politically bad, against available evidence and in light of rationally transparent argumentation. In these portrayals, the historical critic is a Socratic figure: moderate and intellectually chaste, a realist who opposes dogmatism, even dogmatic realism, in the name of fairness and rational discourse.

If historical criticism produces people like this, humanists with a Socratic openness to argument and self-correction, then it arguably does some good in the world. Yet there is one additional ethical good that attaches to historical criticism. All four of the figures whom I have considered in this section make it a point to say that historical criticism is a means by which scholars attain an important contemporary virtue: recognition of and respect for the Other. Nissinen notes that objects of study are embedded in ancient contexts; they are distant from the scholar such that the “historian remains an outsider” and “otherness cannot be chased away.”³¹ The historian does not force his way into a past that is Other in order to lay it bare; instead, he offers, rather more modestly and discreetly, a hermeneutical construction of the Other from his own distant position. Dobbs-Allsopp sees “respect for others and their beliefs, values, and material products” as an ethical value that we learn from critical historicism. In arriving at a “just estimation of the past on its own terms,” we create an intelligible past that is usable in understanding who we are today and what kind of future is possible.³² Hendel connects the historical Other to the contemporary Other: if one honors the dead by speaking as truthfully about them as possible, the living are also honored. Respect for the first is bound up with respect for the second. The insight here is that by placing an ethical imperative at the center of scholarly work, historical criticism gives biblical studies moral as well as intellectual coherence.

13.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed arguments for and against the use of historical criticism in biblical studies and highlighted a common commitment to a new kind of scholarly virtue ethics, a sort of Socratic respect

31. Nissinen, “Reflections,” 487.

32. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 268–69.

for the Other. In choosing a Nietzschean title for this chapter, I have tried to suggest that present debates arise from long-standing tensions in the development of modern historical, philological scholarship. They go back at least to Nietzsche's time. In what he called an untimely meditation, Nietzsche warned of the dangers of historical *Wissenschaft*:

A historical phenomenon clearly and completely understood and reduced to an intellectual phenomenon, is for him who has understood it dead: for in it he has understood the mania, the injustice, the blind passion, and in general the whole earthly darkened horizon of that phenomenon, and just in this he has understood its historical power. So far as he is a knower this power has now become powerless for him: not yet perhaps so far as he is a living being. History, conceived as pure science and become sovereign, would constitute a kind of final closing out of the accounts of life for mankind. Historical education is wholesome and promising for the future only in the service of a powerful new life-giving influence, of a rising culture for example; that is, only when it is ruled and guided by a higher power and does not itself rule and guide.³³

One way of characterizing present debates about historical criticism is to suggest that we are, in a new way, coming to terms with a dichotomy between knowledge and life. To acknowledge this is to raise the possibility that Nietzsche was correct: humans need history in order to be human, but humans also need to forget history in order to live as humans in their own right. If Nietzsche was correct about this paradoxical situation, then it may be that our long-standing commitment to historical science as a paradigm for analyzing and transmitting a culturally relevant Bible has exhausted its usefulness. Historical knowledge has become moribund, and historians now bear what Paul called "the odor of death and doom" (2 Cor 2:16). What is needed, apparently, is a form of history that serves some larger vision of life. This sentiment is shared by those who dislike historical criticism and those who defend it. When critics of historical criticism argue for a mode of biblical study that deemphasizes history and focuses instead on textual meaning or the construction of meaning, I believe that *they are seeking life*. When they fasten our attention to the political contours of scholarship and prioritize justice over an unstable truth, *they are seeking life*. When defenders of historical criti-

33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 14.

cism agree with postmodernists that our knowledge is provisional and incomplete—and when they argue that the value of historical criticism lies in its contributions to virtue ethics and the morality of knowledge—I believe that *they are also seeking life*. I have left theological arguments for and against historical criticism out of account in this chapter. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that they are somehow irrelevant; nor do I want to diminish the importance of a discourse that has been central to historical criticism since its beginnings. Yet Nietzsche is relevant here too. For many academic theological interpreters, Nietzsche's call for a subordinate form of historical education that is ruled and guided by a higher power is consistent with a desire for a robust theological witness. Though Nietzsche would have seen recourse to older theological categories as a tragic misstep, the present resurgence of theological interpretation is itself part of the quest for something that is living and vital, *an attempt to move from history to life*.

Whether contemporary reckonings with the nature and legacy of historical criticism have yielded an ethical turn in ways of conceiving the purpose of biblical studies is, of course, an open question. The phrase may or may not capture what is distinctive about recent treatments of the topic. Nevertheless, as long as historical knowledge of the Bible's ancient contexts is regarded as a partial and problematic attainment, it seems that something other than scientific understanding of the past is needed to justify modern criticism within the academy: cultural literacy, respect for the other, reinforcement of democratic pluralism, justice and liberation for oppressed peoples, opposition to fundamentalism, and so on. In adducing moral and political goods, even contemporary defenders of historical criticism seem to acknowledge this point. When these goods are commended to those within and outside the guild, scholars face a choice whether to pursue these goods within the context of their work. Any choice among various goods, any attempt to reckon with questions of larger aim or purpose, however, places one in the realm of the ethical. To reckon with questions of purpose is to consider how scholars ought to relate history to life. Versions of this pairing, of course, have never been lacking; they have animated programs for biblical interpretation as long as the Bible has been an object of study. In this sense, the study of the Bible has always been ethical. What changes over time is the kind of attention paid to the ethical, the language used to describe it, and the willingness to speak when one's vision of the good, not merely one's expertise, is at stake in the debate.

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14

Heritage Ethics, Intergenerational Equity, and the Publication of Unprovenanced Biblical Texts

Rick Bonnie

14.1. Introduction

The way in which scholars of biblical studies and related disciplines (e.g., Assyriology, Coptic studies) have engaged with their source material—the physical fragments of papyri, parchment, clay tablets, and the like—has recently been changing. Notably more scholars have seen hands-on opportunities to study and publish such text-bearing artifacts. At the same time, evidence has become available that many of these recently surfaced artifacts have questionable histories of illicit activities, whether through looting, smuggling, or forgery.

As a result, both scholars and professional organizations have increased their efforts to advocate policies against using, studying, or publishing such questionable materials in biblical scholarship. While the motivations behind implementing new policies are understood by many, vocal critics tend to remain. Those critics argue that any such restrictions on scholarship in the end leads to a loss of valuable historical material. On the other hand, others have taken the archaeological context of text-bearing artifacts, their materiality, and their ownership history as a way to reexamine long-held scholarly views and to reshape their research and discipline.

In this chapter, I explore the role of the illicit trade of text-bearing artifacts in relation to the scholarship in biblical studies and related disciplines. In particular, I focus on the latter two aspects of the development I outlined above: the different angles in the debate on the study and publication of unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts and the ways in which the changing emphasis on heritage ethics and provenance brings up new

opportunities to revise and reshape the field of biblical studies. I use the term *provenance* here to designate the origins of a text-bearing artifact, starting from the context of modern archaeological discovery through the history of acquisition and ownership afterward. An *unprovenanced* object means that parts of, or the complete information about, its history are unknown or undisclosed.¹

In particular, I aim to place the question of studying and publishing unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts into a larger debate around intergenerational equity and sustainability practices within heritage studies.² With this I mean the right of future generations to interact with cultural heritage—in this case, text-bearing artifacts—in their own way. I touch upon the anxieties and desires of scholars to protect and preserve these artifacts for present scholarly valorization.³ First however, I will provide a brief overview of the problems and harmful consequences of the illicit antiquities trade and the debate surrounding the role of academics within this trade. I will not engage much with the workings of the antiquities trade in general, nor with particular examples,⁴ but I will provide direction to excellent discussions in the notes.

1. See Patty Gerstenblith, “Provenances: Real, Fake, and Questionable,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 26 (2019): 287–91.

2. For an initial discussion, see Rick Bonnie, “‘Haven’t We Dug Enough Now?’ Excavation in the Light of Intergenerational Equity,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 18 (2011): 48–58. See also the other contributions in the discussion on “why excavate” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 18 (2011).

3. Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O’Connell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Cornelius Holtorf, “Can Less Be More? Heritage in the Age of Terrorism,” *Public Archaeology* 5 (2006): 101–9; Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21 (2015): 405–21; Holtorf and Oscar Ortman, “Endangerment and Conservation Ethos in Natural and Cultural Heritage: The Case of Zoos and Archaeological Sites,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14 (2008): 74–90; Liv Nilsson Stutz, “The Noah Complex and Archaeology in the Holy Land. The Case of the Mamilla Cemetery and the Museum of Tolerance and Human Dignity,” *Heritage and Society* 5 (2012): 221–48.

4. For a general overview, see Neil Brodie, Jenny Doole, and Peter Watson, *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2000); Simon Mackenzie et al., *Trafficking Culture: New Directions in Researching the Global Market in Illicit Antiquities* (London: Routledge, 2019).

14.2. Heritage Ethics and Biblical Studies

In September 2016, the Society of Biblical Literature, the largest professional organization for scholars in biblical studies, adopted a policy on research ethics regarding the use of unprovenanced objects in presentations and publications.⁵ With this, the Society of Biblical Literature took a firmer stance in the ethical debate on how scholars of biblical studies and related disciplines should engage with archaeological objects. A few years later, in January 2020, one of the larger publishers in biblical studies and classics, Brill, adopted a section on unprovenanced artifacts in their *Publication Ethics* guidebook after having received an open letter by the papyrologist Roberta Mazza and signed by a hundred other academics about their publication of fake and unprovenanced Dead Sea Scrolls-like manuscript fragments.⁶ The reasons for these policy changes are by now probably well known to many in the field.

Biblical studies and related text-focused disciplines, including papyrology, classics, and Assyriology, have a provenance problem. In recent years, scholars have been confronted by many incidents in those disciplines that are closely related to the illicit antiquities trade. These include: (1) provenance issues, repatriation claims, and research on a large number of manuscript fragments and Aramaic incantation bowls with unclear or disputed provenance in the Schøyen collection;⁷ (2) approximately ten

5. Society of Biblical Literature, "SBL Policy on Scholarly Presentation and Publication of Ancient Artifacts," <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116n>. The policy came into force in 2017. The Society's policy endorses the American Society of Overseas Research's "Policy on Professional Conduct," <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116o/>, adopted in 2015. For discussion of these policies, see Dennis Mizzi and Jodi Magness, "Provenance vs. Authenticity: An Archaeological Perspective on the Post-2002 'Dead Sea Scrolls-Like' Fragments," *DSD* 26 (2019): 135–69; Rick Bonnie et al., "Professional Ethics, Provenance, and Policies: A Survey of Dead Sea Scrolls Scholars," *DSD* 27 (2020): 257–93.

6. Brill, "Brill's Publication Ethics," 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116f>. For the letter, see Roberta Mazza, "Open Letter to Brill: Fake and Unprovenanced Manuscripts," *Faces & Voices: People, Artefacts, Ancient History*, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116k>. For the term *Dead Sea Scrolls-like*, see Mizzi and Magness, "Provenance vs. Authenticity."

7. See, with further references, Neil Brodie and Morag M. Kersel, "WikiLeaks, Text, and Archaeology: The Case of the Schøyen Incantation Bowls," in *Archaeologies of Text: Archaeology, Technology, and Ethics*, ed. Matthew T. Rutz and Morag M. Kersel, Joukowsky Institute Publication 6 (Oxford: Oxbow, 2014), 198–213; Neil Brodie, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls in War and in Peace," in *Art Crime: Terrorists, Tomb Raiders*,

thousand unprovenanced cuneiform tablets stored in Cornell University's Jonathan and Jeannette Rosen Cuneiform Tablet Collection that were likely looted from Iraq during the 1990s and 2000s;⁸ (3) thousands of unprovenanced papyrus fragments and cuneiform tablets purchased by Hobby Lobby (named the "Green Collection," after its president Steve Green) with the intention of displaying them in the Museum of the Bible, opened in 2017, and the problems with their scholars' publication initiative;⁹ (4) the Gospel of Jesus's Wife forgery case;¹⁰ (5) the discovery of an unprovenanced and unknown text by the classical Greek poet Sappho;¹¹ and (6) the discovery that most if not all post-2002 Dead Sea Scrolls-like fragments (in the Schøyen and other private collections) may be forgeries.¹² These are only the larger cases of problematic provenances and collections that, occasionally, receive reporting by international news

Forgers and Thieves, ed. Noah Charney (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 169–78; Christopher Prescott and Josephine Munch Rasmussen, "Exploring the 'Cozy Cabal of Academics, Dealers and Collectors' through the Schøyen Collection," *Heritage* 3 (2020): 68–97.

8. See Neil Brodie, "Congenial Bedfellows? The Academy and the Antiquities Trade," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 27 (2011): 419; Brodie, "Scholarly Engagement with Collections of Unprovenanced Ancient Texts," in *Cultural Heritage at Risk*, ed. Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage (Stockholm: Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2016), 124–25; Brodie, "Cornell Cuneiform," *Market of Mass Destruction: Commentary and Opinion on the Illicit Trade in Cultural Objects* (blog), 13 October 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116h>.

9. See Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Roberta Mazza, "The Green Papyri and the Museum of the Bible," in *The Museum of the Bible: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Jill Hicks-Keeton and Cavan Concannon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 171–206.

10. See Ariel Sabar, *Veritas: A Harvard Professor, a Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus's Wife* (New York: Doubleday Books, 2020).

11. See Ariel Sabar, "A Biblical Mystery at Oxford," *The Atlantic*, June 2020; C. Michael Sampson, "Deconstructing the Provenances of P. Sapph. Obbink," *BASP* 57 (2020): 143–69.

12. See, e.g., Kipp Davis et al., "Nine Dubious 'Dead Sea Scrolls' Fragments from the Twenty-First Century," *DSD* 24 (2017): 189–228; Årstein Justnes and Josephine Munch Rasmussen, "Soli Deo Gloria? The Scholars, the Market, and the Dubious Post-2002 Dead Sea Scrolls-Like Fragments," *The Bible and Interpretation* (2017), <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116p>; Mizzi and Magness, "Provenance vs. Authenticity"; Årstein Justnes and Josephine Munch Rasmussen, "More Dubious Dead Sea Scrolls: Four Pre-2002 Fragments in the Schøyen Collection," *DSD* 28 (2021): 20–37.

agencies. With the rise of Internet auction houses like eBay, collections of smaller, lower-value but yet problematic objects probably number in the thousands around the world.¹³ One example forms the so-called Ilves Collection in Finland, a collection presumably gathered primarily through the Internet of around a thousand ancient Greek, Coptic, and Arabic manuscript fragments.¹⁴ It seems that, through the Internet, such smaller collections may originate from the same pool of dealers as some of the larger collections.¹⁵

The recent surge in unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts on the antiquities market is related to the interest from collectors and scholars alike (fig. 1). Research has shown that market demand is *the* key factor in the rise of looting and illicit trafficking of archaeological objects.¹⁶ This market demand is driven by collectors in Western countries (so-called

13. Neil Brodie, "Virtually Gone! The Internet Market in Antiquities," in *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of Experts on the Return of Cultural Property* (Seoul: Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, 2017), 190–204; Mark Altaweel, "The Market for Heritage: Evidence from eBay Using Natural Language Processing," *Social Science Computer Review* (2019), doi.org/10.1177/0894439319871015.

14. Ivan Miroshnikov, "Koptskie Rukopisi iz Chastnogo Sobraniia 'Ilves' (Khel'sinki, Finlandiia)," *Egipet i sopedel'nye strany* 4 (2016): 42–44.

15. This, at least, can be observed from the Ilves Collection transactions that were gathered by this author through eBay's public feedback system. Among the bought auction lots, a considerable number of sales were made with the Istanbul-based dealers "MixAntik" and "Minnos2004." At least the former account has been identified with antiquities dealer Yakup Eksioglu, who also sold objects to, among others, the Green Collection. See Mazza, "Green Papyri"; Sabar, "Biblical Mystery at Oxford." Another frequently occurring eBay ID is "mjgreyfarr," who was associated with the manuscript dealer Bruce P. Ferrini after the latter's bankruptcy in 2005. See also Hany N. Takla, "The Masacre in San Jose: The Sale of Dismembered Manuscripts of Christian Egypt on EBay," in *Synaxis Katholike: Beiträge zu Gottesdienst und Geschichte der fünf altkirchlichen Patriarchate für Heinzgerd Brakmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Diliana Atanassova and Tinatin Chronz, *Orientalia-patristica-oecumenica* 6.2 (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2014), 705–16. For more on the Ilves Collection, see now Rick Bonnie, "The Ilves Collection: A Finnish Manuscript Collector and the Academic Facilitators," in *Variant Scholarship: Ancient Texts in Modern Contexts*, ed. Neil Brodie, Morag M. Kersel, and Josephine Munch Rasmussen (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2023), 79–94.

16. Kenneth Polk, "The Global Trade in Illicit Antiquities: Some New Directions?," in *Heritage Crime: Progress, Prospects and Prevention*, ed. Louise Grove and Suzie Thomas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 211–15; Mackenzie et al., *Trafficking Culture*, 1–39, 58–76.

market countries), whether wealthy private collectors, museums, or other institutions seeking to buy objects through dealers and online and mortar-and-brick auction houses. A rising market demand for particular objects, such as text-bearing artifacts since around the 1990s, then ultimately leads to an increase in looting of particularly these types of objects where they occur in the archaeological record (so-called source countries)—that is, across the Middle East and North Africa.

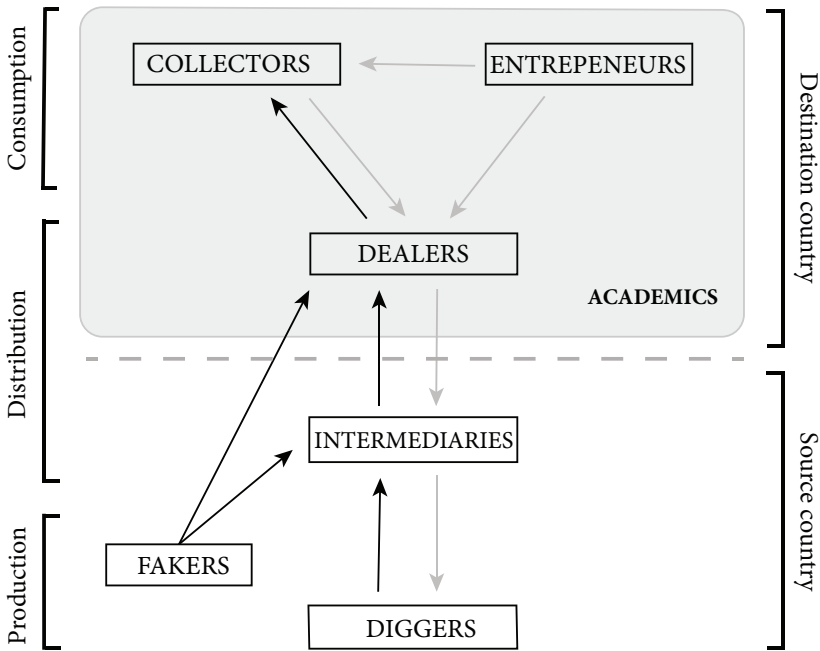


Fig. 1. Schematic model of the antiquities trade (following Brodie, “Congenial Bedfellows?” fig. 5). Black arrows denote de facto ownership of antiquities; gray arrows denote flows of money.

On an international political level, the destruction of heritage through war and looting activities has led to a continuous development of international treaties attempting to reduce and stop these activities. The best-known and most important of these is the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, ratified to date by 143

states.¹⁷ It is important to note, though, that many source countries already had stringent legislation in place well before this convention.¹⁸ On the other hand, the primarily Western destination countries have been slow in implementing the convention and developing adequate legislation.¹⁹

The harmful consequences of the global antiquities trade have been well documented and summed up by Neil Brodie.²⁰ I note the consequences here as they relate to text-bearing artifacts in biblical studies:

1. Destroying and not documenting the context of text-bearing artifacts severely restricts the archaeological knowledge of these objects. This has implications for the authenticity, dating, and understanding of the cultural, religious, social, and economic use of the objects.
2. Destroying heritage as a consequence of looting activities can have severe implications for local communities and their identities.
3. Embedding local heritage in Western private and museum collections can lead to cultural mistranslation due to a Western emphasis on primarily visual aesthetics, resulting in a disconnected display of these objects.
4. Ignoring the legislation of source countries—many of which are developing countries with long histories of colonial oppression—regarding their heritage by Western dealers, facilitators, and collectors devalues their right to self-governance and sovereignty.
5. Trafficking text-bearing artifacts to Western destination countries deprives the source countries of the long-term economic benefit

17. Patty Gerstenblith, "Implementation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention by the United States and Other Market Nations," in *The Routledge Companion to Cultural Property*, ed. Jane Anderson and Haidy Geismar (London: Routledge, 2017), 70–88.

18. See, e.g., for Iraq, Tess Davis, "From Babylon to Baghdad: Cultural Heritage and Constitutional Law in the Republic of Iraq," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 21 (2014): 454. See, for Egypt, Salima Ikram, "Collecting and Repatriating Egypt's Past: Toward a New Nationalism," in *Contested Cultural Heritage: Religion, Nationalism, Erasure, and Exclusion in a Global World*, ed. Helaine Silverman (New York: Springer, 2011), 142–45. For Israel/Palestine, see Morag M. Kersel, "The Trade in Palestinian Artefacts," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 33 (2008): 24–32.

19. E.g., France in 1998, Finland in 1999, the UK and Japan in 2002, Germany and Norway in 2007, the Netherlands in 2009. See Gerstenblith, "Implementation," 78.

20. Brodie, "Congenial Bedfellows?," 409–10.

associated with these objects (e.g., museum visitors, publications, tourism).

6. The illicit trade in antiquities is closely linked to other types of transnational organized criminal activities, including money laundering and drug trafficking.

14.3. The Role of Academic Experts

While the study of the antiquities trade has received considerable attention, how the work of academics relates to this trade network has only recently been taken up, most notably by the archaeologist Neil Brodie.²¹ In the framework of biblical studies, this debate has centered largely on the question of whether to study and publish recently surfaced, unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts or not. Brodie rightly pointed out that, other than limiting the scientific knowledge, this debate never goes deep into any of the other harmful consequences of the antiquities trade. Nor does the debate, in general, tend to emphasize more questionable roles of academics as object identifiers and authenticators, provenance suppressors, and as collaborators in potentially criminal activities.²² Brodie's research has centered more on these consequences and academic roles.²³

While I do not wish to downplay any of the other severe consequences of the antiquities trade, in this chapter I focus nonetheless on the scientific knowledge argument as it relates to the artifacts' study and publication.

21. See Neil Brodie, "Consensual Relations? Academic Involvement in the Illegal Trade in Ancient Manuscripts," in *Criminology and Archaeology: Studies in Looted Antiquities*, ed. Penny Green and Simon Mackenzie (Oxford: Hart, 2009), 41–58; Brodie, "Congenial Bedfellows?"; Brodie, "Scholarly Engagement"; Brodie, "Aramaic Incantation Bowls." See also Kathryn Walker Tubb, "Irreconcilable Differences? Problems with Unprovenanced Antiquities," *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 18 (2007): 3–11; Neil Brodie and Morag M. Kersel, "The Social and Political Consequence of Devotion to Biblical Artifacts," in *All the King's Horses: Essays on the Impact of Looting and the Illicit Antiquities Trade on Our Knowledge of the Past*, ed. Paula K. Lazrus and Alex W. Barker (Washington, DC: The Society of American Archaeology Press, 2012), 109–25; Brodie and Kersel, "WikiLeaks, Text, and Archaeology"; Roberta Mazza, "The Illegal Papyrus Trade and What Scholars Can Do to Stop It," *Hyperallegoric*, 1 March 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116j>; Mazza, "Green Papyri," 190–94.

22. Brodie, "Consensual Relations?," 51–52.

23. See notably Brodie, "Consensual Relations?"; Brodie, "Congenial Bedfellows?"; Brodie and Kersel, "Social and Political Consequence."

My reasons for this focus are twofold. Publishing unprovenanced text fragments remains an ongoing dispute among biblical scholars. A 2006 statement by the Biblical Archaeology Society signed by 157 academics, many of whom are leaders in the field, questioned the policy limitations enforced by professional organizations regarding the presentation and publication of unprovenanced objects.²⁴ Furthermore, a recent survey undertaken among Dead Sea Scrolls scholars suggests that around one-third of the scholars who took part in this survey had previously worked with unprovenanced manuscripts.²⁵ Whether the recent policy changes in the Society of Biblical Literature and other organizations may have some future corrective effect remains to be seen. In any case, disciplinary measures may not be best suited for a debate in which those opposed to them are already suggesting being censored and have a (perhaps mistaken) belief in scientific exceptionalism.²⁶ This brings me to the second reason. It appears that those advocating study and publication of unprovenanced objects primarily direct their argument toward a discussion of the objects' preservation and the information they contain.

Indeed, the pivotal point for those advocates hinges on the dilemma around finding and loss: when unprovenanced objects are studied and published, they and the knowledge they contain are preserved for future generations; otherwise the objects and the knowledge are lost. Those scholars who oppose publication have, first and foremost, responded to this argument by denouncing the knowledge contained in the objects themselves, instead pointing to the notion that it is the archaeological *context*

24. Biblical Archaeology Society, "Publication of Unprovenanced Objects," 1 June 2006, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116e>.

25. Bonnie et al., "Professional Ethics," 265.

26. See, e.g., David I. Owen, "Censoring Knowledge: The Case for the Publication of Unprovenanced Cuneiform Tablets," in *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities*, ed. James Cuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 125–42; Biblical Archaeology Society, "Publication of Unprovenanced Objects," Art. 9; Meir Lubetski, foreword to *New Seals and Inscriptions, Hebrew, Idumean, and Cuneiform*, ed. Meir Lubetski, HBM 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), xiii–xvi; Othmar Keel, "Is the New Moabite Inscription a Forgery?," *BAR* 31.4 (2005): 56; Frank Moore Cross, "Statement on Inscribed Artifacts without Provenance," *BAR* 31.5 (2005): 58. On scientific exceptionalism and how it relates to the study of antiquities, see Susan Pollock, "Archaeology as a Means for Peace or a Source of Violence? An Introduction," *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 4 (2008): 358–59; Brodie and Kersel, "Social and Political Consequence."

providing them with much of their meaning. Being decontextualized means that the scientific knowledge is minimal. Those scholars working on what is inscribed or depicted on an object, including biblical scholars, have countered this argument by insisting that artistic or text-bearing objects still carry a large amount of knowledge independent of their find context.²⁷

14.4. Intergenerational Equity

It is, perhaps, ironic to be arguing the value of publishing unprovenanced cuneiform records. It should be self-evident that a scholar's role is to promote knowledge, not to censor it, to publish new finds, not to ignore them, and to preserve those finds, not to relegate them to oblivion. Yet here I am arguing this very issue.²⁸

The above quotation from Assyriologist David Owen, at first sight, may make a lot of sense to many. According to Owen, the choice for publishing is one between preserving an artifact—whether the origins are legal, dubious, or illicit—or relegating it to oblivion. However, when taking a closer look at Owen's claim, concerns tend to arise. What, in fact, is Owen preserving and what not? In what manner is he preserving this and to what end? And, most importantly, for whom is he undertaking this effort of preservation? In the discussion on the study and publication of unprovenanced objects, these questions tend to remain little explored.

To start with who is to benefit from scholars' efforts, the rarity by which they address this question suggests that its answer is perhaps too obvious to state in print. In the few instances it is noted, the answer focuses on preserving important knowledge and information for a future generation of scholars. As Owen wrote elsewhere, "From my perspective, any and all such written documentation must be rescued, recorded, preserved, and published.... The current body of texts now in private hands includes critically important historical, literary, religious, and economic information."²⁹

27. James C. Y. Wyatt, "Antiquities and the Importance—and Limitations—of Archaeological Contexts," in *Whose Culture? The Promise of Museums and the Debate over Antiquities*, ed. James Cuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 89–106; John Boardman, "Archaeologists, Collectors, and Museums," in Cuno, *Whose Culture?*, 107–24; Owen, "Censoring Knowledge."

28. Owen, "Censoring Knowledge," 125.

29. David I. Owen, "An Archaeological Dilemma," *Science* 309.5742 (2005): 1816. See also Bendt Alster, "One Cannot Slaughter a Pig and Have It: A Summary of

It appears from such statements that publishing unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts somehow rescues or salvages objects that otherwise would have disappeared and/or been destroyed.

Often, however, the notion of future scholars remains quite unspecified. Are we talking here about ten, fifty, or two hundred years into the future? And how is access to this record, that is, the publication, guaranteed to all scholars? The notions of long-term preservation, discoverability, and accessibility are remarkably absent in responses from those who advocate for publishing unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts. Judging from current practices, I would argue that these publications now primarily serve to benefit this generation (and a few of the next one) of Western university researchers, notably its author, but do not serve future generations far and wide.³⁰ Scholars from the parts of the developing world from which these objects derive neither have the objects in their possession nor, usually, the ability to gain access to the publications. Yet, according to Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as issued by the United Nations in 1948, access to knowledge is considered a basic human right—let alone if such knowledge comes from cultural heritage looted from those scholars' soil.³¹

The terminology used by the publishing advocates is not too different from the *ex situ* preservation method par excellence used in contract archaeology—rescue excavation. This term refers to archaeological excavations that are undertaken by either state or contract archaeologists in order to document and preserve sites that are in danger of destruction due to, for instance, future road or building construction. This type of archaeology (either called “rescue archaeology” or “cultural resource management”) developed during the latter stages of the twentieth cen-

Sumerian Proverbs in the Schøyen Collection,” *Or* 75 (2006): 91 n. 1; Ivan Miroshnikov, “An Early Coptic Letter (P.IIves Copt. 101),” *CdE* 92.183 (2017): 191 n. 3.

30. For instance, on the issue of Eurocentrism in papyrology, see Usama A. Gad, “Papyrology and Eurocentrism, Partners in Crime,” *EIDOLON*, 8 November 2019, <https://eidolon.pub/papyrology-and-eurocentrism-partners-in-crime-8a2778908e59>.

31. John Willinsky, *The Access Principle: The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 143–54. For the declaration, see United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” December 10, 1948, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116m>. Global access to scientific knowledge is one of the principles that, since the early 2010s, rejuvenated the open-science movement. Jonathan P. Tennant et al., “The Academic, Economic and Societal Impacts of Open Access: An Evidence-Based Review,” *F1000Research* 5.632 (2016): 14–16.

tury across North America and Europe, as well as in other regions around the globe.³²

Obviously, I do not equate rescue archaeology with the publication of unprovenanced objects, but since those advocating publishing these objects do so under the label of “rescuing,” I believe it is valuable to explore what this, in fact, entails and to place their handling of the issue within wider discussions on preservation in rescue archaeology. There is not only a resemblance in labeling their activities but also in terms of the purpose of the enterprise. Different from academic excavations, where hypotheses and questions dictate the location of investigation and the respective methods of study, rescue archaeology is undertaken out of necessity and, hence, the location and method are settled prior to the questions that can be asked of the site.³³ The same holds for most published unprovenanced objects, as they are studied not because of an underlying research question but because of their availability to and interest by the scholar in question.

Some time ago, I discussed rescue excavations as a method of preservation in light of the broader principle of intergenerational equity.³⁴ Below I will redirect this framework onto the issue of scholarly publication of unprovenanced objects. The wish to publish and preserve text-bearing historical objects is closely bound to our understanding of these objects as unique and part of a finite, nonrenewable resource. This understanding derives from a comparison of archaeological heritage with the natural resource sector and the ongoing discussions on how to develop the world in a sustainable manner for future generations.³⁵

Some scholars have questioned the validity of this comparison and hence have questioned whether scarce resources should be used for “unknown needs of unspecified future generations.”³⁶ To be sure, to some extent those scholars may be correct in noting that in recent decades the heritage sector has become obsessed with conservation and safeguarding

32. Jean-Paul Demoule, “Rescue Archaeology: A European View,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 611–26.

33. Gavin Lucas, “Destruction and the Rhetoric of Excavation,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 34 (2001): 35–46; Holtorf and Ortman, “Endangerment and Conservation Ethos.”

34. Bonnie, “Haven’t We Dug Enough Now?”

35. See World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

36. Holtorf and Ortman, “Endangerment and Conservation Ethos,” 82. See also Lucas, “Destruction”; Holtorf, “Can Less Be More?”; Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion.”

practices. The historical geographer David Lowenthal wrote, “We value our heritage most when it seems at risk; threats of loss spur owners to stewardship.”³⁷ The emphasis, however, both by stewards and their critics is often upon *ex situ* preservation methods, thereby centering on the actual material object. As such, it feels like those critiquing the understanding of archaeological heritage as a finite resource are claiming ownership of the archaeological record by providing choices regarding protection in the present.

However, artifacts such as cuneiform tablets, papyrus fragments, and the like achieve historical or archaeological value—that is, heritage status—not in and of themselves but by our ascribing such value to them.³⁸ I therefore argue that the importance of preserving for the future should come from a human-centered perspective, not dictated by our artifacts.³⁹ Preservation is not only about the future well-being of the material remains themselves; rather it concerns the equal right of every generation of people to interact with the historical and archaeological record in the way it chooses to. In that sense, preservation is addressing the ethical principle of intergenerational equity.⁴⁰

14.5. Deselection at the Looting Pit

What is being preserved out of the ground is inevitably a selective process. Not all the remains from an archaeological site, whether through documented legal excavation or undocumented illegal looting, become archaeological artifacts of cultural or scientific value that can and should be preserved. Whether this sounds unfortunate or not, this understanding is, to my knowledge, commonplace among scholars and heritage practitioners. The selection process about which archaeological site to choose, and at the archaeological site itself, which data to document, is ultimately based on present needs and interest. As a result, those remains and sites that are presently not recognized as of a certain cultural or scientific value are being deselected and are either destroyed or under threat of destruction. Therefore, it is good to be reminded of those objects that due to the

37. Lowenthal, *Heritage Crusade*, 24.

38. Lucas, “Destruction,” 38.

39. See Bonnie, “Haven’t We Dug Enough Now?,” 49.

40. Edith Brown Weiss, “In Fairness to Future Generations and Sustainable Development,” *American University International Law Review* 8 (1992): 19–26.

publication of papyrus fragments and cuneiform tablets are being deselected, or destroyed, from inclusion as scientific knowledge. The act of deselection, or destruction, is as much a conscious decision as the act of selection, or rescue.

As I already noted, the market for cultural objects is driven by market demand, not by supply. This means that dealers and collectors of cultural artifacts, through their choice of object types, bring the supply chain (i.e., the looting activities) to life. The recent surge in the supply of text-bearing artifacts onto the markets is but one example of this.

It should be noted, first of all, that only a small fraction of these illicitly traded objects ultimately reach public collections and researchers, as many instead are sold to unknown private collectors who do not open their collections to the public.⁴¹ These objects usually disappear, and, even if after decades or centuries they reach public sight again, it is likely to be with considerable degradation and information loss. Second, the demand-driven illicit antiquities market, where provenance is concealed, also effectively stimulates a supply of forgeries onto the market and into the scholarly record.⁴² While occasionally forgeries are recognized as such, as in the case of the post-2002 Dead Sea Scrolls-like fragments or the Gospel of Jesus's Wife papyrus fragment, scholars can never be certain that the scientific record is currently devoid of forgeries. Third, since the act of looting is demand-driven, a much higher number of archaeological remains encountered during the search for these artifacts for which market demand exists, including ceramics, architecture, and human remains, are simply destroyed or decontextualized during the often-uncontrolled digging. Hence, those archaeological remains are deselected from any possibility of controlled scientific investigation.

As expert investigators of these objects, scholars are clearly situated within the antiquities trade model as part of the destination market (fig. 1). As such, those scholars advocating for publishing unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts bear an equal responsibility for those archaeological objects lost during the act of looting and in private collections, as well as for forgeries coming into the scientific record. By rescuing the unprovenanced object that is published, others are destroyed and get lost in the

41. Brodie, "Virtually Gone!"; Mackenzie et al., *Trafficking Culture*, 109–11.

42. See, e.g., Oscar White Muscarella, *The Lie Became Great: The Forgery of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Mizzi and Magness, "Provenance vs. Authenticity."

process. The problem is that those that are rescued are so treated due to present needs and interest, and it remains unknown whether the destroyed objects would have supplied more scientific knowledge in the future.

14.6. Unpublished Storage and Museum Archaeology

Archaeology has been suffering for a long time from a publication crisis. Simply stated, archaeologists have excavated too much and published too little. The causes for the crisis are numerous, but as a result many objects and entire excavations sit unpublished in the storage spaces of museums and other institutions.⁴³ To offer but one example, in the Netherlands it was estimated that by 2003 around four thousand to six thousand archaeological excavations stored in repositories remained unpublished.⁴⁴ The problems have been just as grave in other regions of the world, including the Middle East.⁴⁵ As Jean-Paul Demoule wrote in 2011, “it can be considered that an unpublished excavation is a lost excavation.”⁴⁶ Brian Fagan famously termed this inability by archaeologists to publish “archaeology’s dirty secret.”⁴⁷

It is perhaps also time to reveal a dirty secret of biblical studies and related textual disciplines—large stacks of documented, contextualized, and curated papyri and clay tablets are piled up *unpublished* in storages around the world. It seems odd that some scholars are advocating for pub-

43. See the contributions in the discussion forum “why excavate” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 18 (2011): 5–53. See also Michael K. Trimble and Eugene A. Marino, “Archaeological Curation: An Ethical Imperative for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Ethical Issues in Archaeology*, ed. Larry Zimmerman, Karen D. Vitelli, and Julie Hollowell-Zimmer (Lanham, MD : AltaMira Press, 2003), 99–112; Barbara L. Voss, “Curation as Research: A Case Study in Orphaned and Underreported Archaeological Collections,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 19 (2012): 145–69, and Morag M. Kersel, “Storage Wars: Solving the Archaeological Curation Crisis?,” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 3 (2015): 42–54, including the responses and rejoinder that follow.

44. Bonnie, “Haven’t We Dug Enough Now?,” 50.

45. For numbers, see Raz Kletter and Alon De-Groot, “Excavating to Excess? Implications of the Last Decade of Archaeology in Israel,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 14 (2001): 76–109; John F. Cherry, “Still Not Digging, Much,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 18 (2011): 12.

46. Jean-Paul Demoule, “We Still Have to Excavate—but Not at Any Price,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 18 (2011): 8.

47. Brian Fagan, “Archaeology’s Dirty Secret,” *Archaeology* 48 (1995): 14–17.

lishing text-bearing artifacts with questionable or illicit origins while at the same time overlooking these unpublished, legally acquired artifacts.

Apparently, the original excavators Grenfell and Hunt recovered around 500,000 papyrus and parchment fragments from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, now at Oxford, of which only 5,476 items (ca. 1.1 percent) had been published by 2019.⁴⁸ The British Museum holds around 130,000 cuneiform tablets, most coming from nineteenth-century excavations. Although even a rough number of published items is difficult to give (as the museum is not always alerted when items get published), it is presumed by its curators that perhaps up to half of this collection is available in printed editions—though the number could be even smaller. Hence, tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets remain unpublished in the British Museum's storage spaces.⁴⁹ Finally, for the large University of Michigan Papyrus Collection, it recently has been estimated that 95 percent of the over 18,000 registered objects in its inventory remain unpublished.⁵⁰

Those public collections are just three examples of many more that comprise hundreds of thousands, if not millions of carefully documented and available-for-study text-bearing artifacts. The high number of unpublished items demonstrates the great need for a deeper engagement by scholars with these objects. There is a grave danger that the longer these objects sit unstudied and unpublished in museum storages and repositories, the more fragmented, degraded, and decontextualized these objects will become (see below). The unfortunate result may be that they will become obsolete to future scholarly interests. Those scholars preferring to publish text-bearing artifacts with legally questionable provenance also bear a responsibility for the diminishing returns on these documented and curated objects. Moreover, as Brent Nongbri recently highlighted, it

48. For discussion, see Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 227–28. For the most recent number of published items, see Nongbri, “How Much Material from Oxyrhynchus Remains Unpublished?,” *Variant Readings*, October 20, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116l>. See also Sabar, “Biblical Mystery at Oxford.” The Oxyrhynchus papyrus collection is under the custody of the Egyptian Exploration Society: <https://www.ees.ac.uk/papyri>.

49. For the registered cuneiform tablets, see “History of the Collection: Middle East,” *British Museum*, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116g>.

50. See Arthur Verhoogt, *Discarded, Discovered, Collected: The University of Michigan Papyrus Collection* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 2, 169–70.

also means that museums and institutions are being transparent and open toward scholars to work with these materials.⁵¹

14.7. Documentation and Curation Practices

In the case of a rescue excavation, the artifacts, notes, lists, drawings, photographs, and other documentation—that is, the scientific record of the past—ultimately are going to be housed in repositories and museums permanently. While strict conservation and archival standards ensure that this record of the objects and the site are being preserved and accessible over the long run, archaeologists are well aware that “when the primary source has gone, the secondary source can be but a faint reflection of this.”⁵²

The rate of archaeological fieldwork across the globe, including the Middle East, has led to a growing pressure on available physical storage space in repositories and museums. This has led to numerous problems among which is a quicker degradation and decontextualization of already stored materials,⁵³ as well as future deaccessioning of currently stored material.⁵⁴ Simply put, with the current rate of excavation, a discussion and selection of what is deemed worthy of long-term preservation and what can be deaccessioned seems inevitable in the decades ahead.⁵⁵

While the curation of the legacy data of rescue excavations remains a problem, the process of curation is comparatively transparent and guided by standards and practices set by international bodies and national authorities. Turning to collections of unprovenanced objects, whether curation practices follow any standards remains in many cases unknown

51. Nongbri, *God's Library*, 271.

52. M. E. Th. de Grooth and Henk Stoepker, “Archaeological Finds in Depots and Museums: The End of the Line or the Beginning?,” in *Archaeological Heritage Management in the Netherlands*, ed. Willem J. H. Willems, Henk Kars, and D. P. Hallewas (Amersfoort: Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek, 1997), 299.

53. See Grooth and Stoepker, “Archaeological Finds,” 303–7; Voss, “Curation as Research.”

54. Nick Merriman and Hedley Swain, “Archaeological Archives: Serving the Public Interest?,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 2 (1999): 249–67.

55. Bonnie, “Haven't We Dug Enough Now?,” 50; Kersel, “Storage Wars”; Raz Kletter, “Storage Wars 1, Curation 0,” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 3 (2015): 55–60; Neil Asher Silberman, “Is Every Sherd Sacred? Moving Beyond the Cult of Object-Centred Authenticity,” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 3 (2015): 61–62.

due to a lack of transparency with which the storage of material and documentation takes place. It remains in many cases unclear in what type of facilities, under what circumstances, and by whom large collections of unprovenanced objects are curated or when objects are being sold off or repatriated. Equally unclear, as it remains usually unspecified, is what happens in those latter cases with the existing documentation related to the objects.

The large collection of unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts collected by Martin Schøyen can serve as an example.⁵⁶ His collection has been studied and published by numerous scholars of biblical studies and Assyriology, as well as other disciplines, but many of the objects have subsequently been sold off through auctions to other private collections, including the Green Collection, for large sums. In this case, what happened with the documentation gathered by the scholars who published these unprovenanced objects (e.g., notes, photographs, drawings, transcriptions) remains entirely unclear. Another example is the recent closing of Cornell's Rosen Cuneiform Tablet Collection, consisting of about ten thousand, likely looted, cuneiform tablets.⁵⁷ Besides other issues Brodie addresses as a result of this decision, one wonders also here about what is happening with the documentation associated with the objects. Are they archived at Cornell University, or are they also returned to Iraq? And, if so, how is the rather fragile link between the objects and their documentation protected in the process of return?⁵⁸

Finally, in the case of the repatriation of such unprovenanced collections, the other question that needs to be asked is who bears the (financial) responsibility for further long-term preservation. While private collectors may gain considerable profit from these cultural objects (e.g., sales, exhibitions, tax deductions), currently it appears that it is the state to which these objects are returned that then also bears the financial responsibility for storage and curation. As Brodie has pointed out, aside from sharing profits, there should be some compensation for the costs

56. See, e.g., Prescott and Rasmussen, "Exploring."

57. Brodie, "Cornell Cuneiform."

58. The same can be asked in the case of the Museum of the Bible's recent return of 8,106 clay tablets and ca. 5,000 papyrus fragments to Iraq and Egypt, respectively. See Steve Green, "Update on Iraqi and Egyptian Items," *Museum of the Bible*, 27 January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/SBL03116i>.

that Iraq now has to endure to preserve this material *ex situ* in its storage facilities.⁵⁹

14.8. Furthering Scientific Knowledge?

With the contextual information lost, the material degraded, and no clear documentation, what is ultimately being preserved is just a faint reflection of the artifact itself. It is a manner of partial recording that is built on the present need and interest of the scholars involved, hopefully following some sort of current standards within their discipline; it is *not* a record that is established with the needs of the public in mind, because the public in their understanding is merely a representation (or embodiment) of themselves.

Indeed, the motives for choosing to study a legally dubious and ethically objectionable archaeological artifact over objects that have been cared for by professional curators for decades are not entirely unclear. The decision relates to some extent to a self-interest and desire by scholars, either because of their particular specialization or because the object in question clarifies a historical problem that they are scientifically invested in.⁶⁰ There also seems to be a connection with the ease with which the object is received and can be published. As the recent survey among Dead Sea Scrolls scholars indicated, quite a number of text scholars (35 percent) are being regularly contacted by dealers or collectors to engage with new unprovenanced artifacts.⁶¹ The development of the Green (now MOTB) Scholars' Initiative about a decade ago should be viewed in this sort of context.⁶² In all those cases there seem to be little to no restrictions in terms of permissions to publish; in fact, the collectors are financially invested to help as much as possible. Finally, one should not ignore the precarious position in which many scholars, including in biblical studies, find themselves in terms of employment and publication pressure.

59. Brodie, "Cornell Cuneiform"; Brodie, "Restorative Justice? Questions Arising out of the Hobby Lobby Return of Cuneiform Tablets to Iraq," *Revista Memória em Rede* 12 (2020): 101.

60. Think, e.g., about the forged Jesus's Wife fragment. See Sabar, *Veritas*. For a focus on self-interest, see also Brodie, "Restorative Justice?," 99.

61. See Bonnie et al., "Professional Ethics," 266.

62. Moss and Baden, *Bible Nation*, 62–98.

The danger for wider scholarship, though, is that publications of unprovenanced objects ultimately seem to lead to a higher degree of conservatism since only that aspect of that object that is considered of value today for that respective scholar (e.g., the inscription) is being preserved for future scholarship to work with. The result is what Chippindale and Gill warned us about thirty years ago: that due to the partial recording, selection, and decontextualization of the object, its scholarly value is severely compromised since any knowledge obtained from the object heavily relies on—and, hence, cannot go much beyond—the already established canon of scholarly knowledge based on similar objects with a clear archaeological findspot.⁶³

Text-concerned scholars have argued fiercely against this view, suggesting (as noted above) that inscriptions and artworks hold substantial information beyond the archaeological context.⁶⁴ While there is surely information to be retrieved from, for example, a decontextualized cuneiform tablet, the question of whether this information is substantial is value-laden and much dependent on which (future) scholar one asks. To paraphrase an argument I used elsewhere in the case of rescue excavations, when the selective process of publication of looted objects based on present needs and interest is systematically applied, there is a danger that this results in a conscious over- or underrepresentation of the archaeological record.⁶⁵ Moreover, the looting that takes place in order to retrieve the unprovenanced text-bearing artifact blocks future researchers from reexamining the archaeological site in question “with entirely novel and different technologies, fresh theoretical assumptions, revised research goals, and new data requirements.”⁶⁶

14.9. Preservation Advocacy, Changing Methods, and Outreach

The archaeological sector generally has highlighted a stronger concern for preserving archaeological sites and objects in situ; that is, leaving them as much as possible undisturbed in the ground. The focus on in situ

63. See David W. J. Gill and Christopher Chippindale, “Material and Intellectual Consequences of Esteem for Cycladic Figures,” *AJA* 97 (1993): 601–59. See also, in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Bonnie et al., “Professional Ethics,” 273.

64. See Owen, “Censoring Knowledge,” 127–28.

65. Bonnie, “Haven’t We Dug Enough Now?,” 49.

66. Cherry, “Still Not Digging, Much,” 13.

preservation was one of the pillars (Art. 4–5) of the Council of Europe’s “Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage,” better known as the Valetta Treaty.⁶⁷ The reasoning behind such focus in the case of potential groundwork is simple. While archaeological objects and sites do show signs of degradation in the ground, this seems not to measure up to the degradation and decontextualization of the archaeological record once above ground. We know that archaeological sites and objects are generally well kept in situ for centuries and millennia, while we can only hope to be able to preserve sites and objects equally long above ground. Moreover, no preselection is made for future generations about what is to be considered an archaeological site or object and how best to investigate it, which adheres to the principle of intergenerational equity. I should add, however, that in situ preservation primarily holds in relation to rescue archaeology—not archaeological research by universities, museums, or other institutions.

Hence, I argue that when taking intergenerational equity seriously in the preservation of our heritage for the future benefit of humanity, we need to consider preserving remains in situ as much as possible, as this is known to be the most coherent, nonselective, and cost-effective manner of preservation. While this principle, at least in theory, has been leading in rescue archaeology, archaeologists need all the help they can get, including biblical scholars and Assyriologists, in order to prevent ongoing looting. For a start this means being conscious of the damage to our cultural heritage that is being done in the process of publishing unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts. Such awareness, hopefully, has an effect on studying and publishing decisions, which ultimately impact collecting, dealing, and looting activities elsewhere in the chain of cultural heritage trafficking. In this way, the objects that would have been looted and those that would have been destroyed in the act of looting remain best preserved with their find context intact for future generations to work on.

A concern with intergenerational equity means not only finding better solutions to preserve our past remains for future generations, but it also concerns the new ways we and future generations will use past remains.

67. Council of Europe, *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Revised)*, European Treaty Series 143 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1992). For context, see Willem J. H. Willems, “The Work of Making Malta: The Council of Europe’s Archaeology and Planning Committee 1988–1996,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 10 (2007): 57–71.

They will ask different questions, they will explore with new theories in hand, and they will develop new—and probably more fine-tuned—methods to work with the past. The quest for new methods and approaches, in fact, has been changing over the last decades.

Scholars of biblical studies and related disciplines have started to ask questions and explore lines of reasoning that require more information in terms of the context and provenance of text-bearing artifacts. For example, with the rise of New Philology, Liv Ingeborg Lied and others have placed more emphasis on the contextual information regarding the production and consumption of manuscripts, and they are eager to see better contextual evidence to appear from the archaeological record.⁶⁸ Another example is Nongbri's work on the earliest biblical manuscripts.⁶⁹ Delving deep into the text-bearing artifacts themselves and their association with other materials has brought deeper insights into their origins that do not necessarily relate to the decontextualized historical reconstructions produced through earlier philological research. Finally, as Nicole Boivin and Alison Crowther have recently shown, the archaeological record, including text-bearing artifacts and associated materials, provides numerous opportunities for research that helps to shape better societies today in terms of sustainability practices.⁷⁰ Ongoing looting will continue to damage this impact.

14.10. Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of the debate on the study and publication of unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts in biblical studies and related disciplines. The study and publication of such material artifacts of uncertain origin has grown rapidly over the last decades but has been subjected to much scrutiny from scholars and professional organizations recently, due to its close association with the illicit antiquities trade. Following the lead from heritage, museum, and archaeology organizations,

68. See, e.g., Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, eds., *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, TUGAL 185 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017); Lied and Marilena Maniaci, eds., *Bible as Notepad: Tracing Annotations and Annotation Practices in Late Antique and Medieval Biblical Manuscripts*, Manuscripta Biblica 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

69. Nongbri, *God's Library*.

70. Nicole Boivin and Alison Crowther, "Mobilizing the Past to Shape a Better Anthropocene," *Nature Ecology and Evolution* 5 (2021): 273–84.

this has led also professional organizations of biblical studies and related disciplines, including the Society of Biblical Literature, to develop strict policies. The looting of ancient artifacts across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as other regions in the Global South, has many harmful consequences, all well documented by archaeological and criminological research. That said, there has been a consistent tendency among scholars of text-bearing artifacts to center the discussion on scientific knowledge production—either rescuing or censoring the information.

In this chapter, I have argued that the study and publication of unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts bears a strong responsibility for devastating destruction of the archaeological heritage worldwide. Rather than preserving the objects, those who publish unprovenanced objects in actuality deselect and hence destroy large amounts of research information that could have benefited scholarly knowledge production of future generations. What is left over for these scholars to work with—the unprovenanced object—is akin to a tiny aspect of the actual object and context, and, as numerous scholars pointed out before, allows for little more than the continuation of a type of knowledge production that is limited in methods, theories, and questions. As recent advances in biblical studies show, a stronger emphasis on the provenance, archaeological context, and materiality of text-bearing artifacts starts shedding new light on our biblical past.

I have emphasized in my discussion the principle of intergenerational equity in relation to heritage preservation, meaning that we aim to provide future generations with the same optionality over the resources as past generations have provided to us. In light of this principle, I have highlighted a stricter focus on in situ preservation of archaeological remains, on the one hand, while, on the other, encouraging more research work on the uncounted unpublished artifacts that are slowly degrading in museum and other storage facilities. Therefore, instead of seeking the easy way of working with unprovenanced text-bearing artifacts on a hit-and-miss basis, a stronger and methodologically more robust approach needs to be developed to work through those storage spaces. This will require cumbersome permission work and conservation learning, a slower process more surely, but also one that provides real tangible benefits to future generations.

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Gender and Gender Research in a Research Community: CSTT as a Case Study

Francis Borchardt, Saana Svärd, and Hanna Tervanotko

15.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses gender in the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) from two distinct but interconnected perspectives. The first part of the article (§15.2) examines how gender has arisen as a concern within CSTT. In order to discern the ways in which gender has appeared as a subject of interest within this academic community, this study investigates gender's emergence in the organizational structure of the CSTT and in its collective scholarly activities. When investigating the CSTT as an organization, this study focuses on hierarchical structures and group makeup. When examining the CSTT as a locus of scholarly research and production, this study highlights both inputs and outputs. It looks at what types of events were hosted by the CSTT, what guests were invited, who gave papers, what they gave papers about, and how the papers addressed topics related to gender. Through examination of the spheres of the CSTT's existence, this paper centers gender and the style thereof as integral to the epistemological success of this academic community.

The second part of the chapter (§15.3) outlines developments of gender studies within the fields of biblical studies and studies on the ancient Near East. This is followed by a discussion that elaborates how these overall ten-

§15.2 was written by Borchardt and Tervanotko and §15.3 by Svärd and Tervanotko, but the article is a joint work with close cooperation. The three authors were members of Teams 1, 3, and 4, respectively, of the CSTT at different career stages.

dencies relate to the activities of the CSTT. We analyze how the research of CSTT members contributed to feminist and gender studies and how these contributions are situated in the epistemology of gender studies. This discussion sheds light on the traditions of biblical and Near Eastern studies at the University of Helsinki.

This chapter aims to highlight how the structures of this academic community had unconscious biases and how their recognition can lead to more equitable and inclusive practices. These observations thus do not concern only the CSTT but are useful for other research communities. Furthermore, we ponder how the gender studies that were carried out in CSTT reflect (1) international tendencies of gender research in ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies and (2) Helsinki traditions in biblical research (and in ancient Near Eastern research) and how gender was, to some extent, one of the forums in CSTT where different research tracks came together.

15.2. CSTT as a Locus of Scholarly Research and Production

How has gender manifested itself as a meaningful category in the life of the CSTT? The investigation approaches this topic in two distinct ways, so that a more comprehensive picture of CSTT's attention to gender can emerge. The first way in which gender is discussed as a component in the life of CSTT is in its institutional structures. This trajectory of inquiry examines the leadership, personnel decisions, guests, and outcomes for participants based on gender.¹ The second area of exploration discusses the scholarly output of CSTT's members, guests, and events for how much and in which ways they focused on gender and sexuality. The combination of these two approaches to the question lays the groundwork for an evaluation of CSTT's own treatment of gender and allows for further reflection on how other scholarly research communities might build on CSTT's experiences and outcomes.

1. Note that all Academy of Finland and internal documentation from CSTT allows for only binary gender categorization. To the extent that there were nonbinary members within the CSTT, they needed to choose one of either male or female gender for the purposes of official documentation. Due to this constraint, reporting within this chapter and any conclusions drawn from it will only be based upon reported binary gender identity.

15.2.1. Structure of CSTT

CSTT received funding and started formal operations at the beginning of 2014. Its term of funding was completed at the end of 2019. During that period, CSTT received €5,593,360 in funding from the Academy of Finland, and €1,398,340 from the University of Helsinki for a total of €6,991,700.² CSTT's director and principal investigator was Martti Nissinen, professor of Old Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Helsinki. CSTT was structured into four research units (called teams), each with their own areas of scientific competence and particular questions.³

From the start, every team had one team leader. Nissinen himself led Team 1, titled *Society and Religion in the Ancient Near East*. Anneli Aejmelaeus led Team 2, designated *Text and Authority*. Aejmelaeus was also vice director of CSTT and acted as director when Nissinen was on research leave in 2015–2016. Team 3, with the moniker *Literary Criticism in Light of Documented Evidence*, was led by Juha Pakkala. Finally, Jutta Jokiranta led Team 4, also known as *Society and Religion in Late Second Temple Judaism*.⁴ These four scholars acted as lead researchers for each of the research areas, held *ex-officio* seats on the board of CSTT, and also took some part in the distribution of funds among team members. Therefore, their role in governance and operations was significant. It is notable that the team leaders were equally divided between male and female scholars and included the principal investigator himself as an equal voice. This structure communicated a degree of equity in the organization of CSTT. This setup was clearly intentional, as the funders had no official guidelines or recommendations on how the scientific work should be carried out in practice. The principal investigator was responsible for developing the organization suitably, which included nominating the board for the Centre.⁵

Although not originally an official position, three teams (1–3) nominated vice-team leaders at various points in the life of CSTT. Izaak de

2. Final report of CSTT (submitted to its funder, Academy of Finland), 2. The report is not a public document, but authors had access to it with permission of Martti Nissinen.

3. See more details in the introductory chapter of this volume.

4. Final report of CSTT (submitted to its funder, Academy of Finland), 5–7.

5. See more details in the introductory chapter of this volume.

Hulster was vice leader of Team 1 since 2016. First, Hanne von Weissenberg, and later Tuukka Kauhanen (switching his association from Team 3) were vice leaders of Team 2. Mika Pajunen was vice leader of Team 3. Team 4 never selected a vice leader. Because of their originally unofficial status, these vice leaders performed various functions depending on the team to which they belonged. Some of them (e.g., de Hulster) stood in for their team leader when the leaders were away from Finland on research leave. Others aided their team leaders in different ways. Von Weissenberg's position was established already during the application process. The other vice leaders were directly appointed by the team leaders. It should be noted that all three of the male vice leaders were members of the CSTT board in its latest incarnation.⁶ Thus, three out of four vice leaders were baptized into official positions within the CSTT outside of the original structure. The all-male gender makeup of these later selections is significant, as even minor promotions of this sort can signal approval of scientific knowledge production and provide meaningful administrative experience and credentials for the next generation of scholars. The experience can provide these individuals with an advantage when competing for positions where administrative experience or a record of research leadership is assessed and valued. Insiders and outsiders alike may interpret the selections as indicating a preference for the scientific and leadership capabilities and potential for these younger scholars among their peers. Such is especially relevant if/when these scholars compete for faculty positions and funding opportunities with their peers in CSTT.

Apart from the four teams comprising the research structure of CSTT, the Centre of Excellence was governed by a board. In its latest published incarnation, this body was composed of the four team leaders, the three male vice team leaders, a PhD representative annually elected by their peers, and a postdoctoral representative annually elected by their peers.⁷ Published information on the board also indicates that vice representatives for the postdoctoral and doctoral members were included on the board, but it is unclear whether these positions were a constant presence or only fulfilled their roles in the absence of the doctoral student representative

6. "CSTT Board"—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset). The data are a snapshot of the final composition of the Board in 2019.

7. "CSTT Board"—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset). Data is a snapshot of the final composition of the Board in 2019.

and postdoctoral representative. In its last published form, the gender makeup of the board (including vice representatives) was seven male scholars compared to four female scholars. Both the *ex-officio* (i.e., leader) and elected (i.e., representative and vice representative) positions exhibited an equal balance of male and female scholars. Hence, we can conclude that the gender discrepancy can be accounted for entirely by the presence of vice leaders of the teams on the board.

Although membership in the teams changed over time, based on the length and type of funding and on the fact that members would take on new positions that prevented them to continue their participation in CSTT, it is possible to count the total number of members over the entire period of CSTT's existence. Based on reported memberships, fifty-two researchers were included among the members of CSTT.⁸ Among all members twenty-four were women, and twenty-six were men. Of the fifty-two total members, twenty-three spent all or part of their time in CSTT as postgraduate students; nine of these completed their degree under the auspices of CSTT, according to the final report.⁹ This means that twenty-nine were classified as postdoctoral researchers, researchers, or professors. There were twelve women classified as postgraduate students, while eleven were men; the gender balance among those who are reported to have completed their doctoral degree within CSTT is five women to four men. This leaves the ratio of postdoctoral researchers, researchers, and professors at thirteen women to sixteen men. The size and gender ratio of the four scientific teams was inconsistent (see table 1 below). Team 1 had a total of twenty-one members, twelve women and nine men. Team 2 totaled twelve members, seven women, and five men. Team 3 had nine total members, all nine of whom were men. Team 4 had ten total members, six of whom were women, four were men. This means that three of four teams had a disparity in gender representation in favor of women. One team had a steep gender disparity tilted toward men to the extent that it included no women scholars. Thus, what appears from afar to show a balanced attention to gender makeup of the research personnel demands further scrutiny on the team level, where a different story becomes apparent.

8. Final report of CSTT (submitted to its funder, Academy of Finland), 5–7.

9. Final report of CSTT (submitted to its funder, Academy of Finland), p. 11.

Team	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Total
Postgrad female	5	4	0	3	13
Postgrad male	4	4	3	0	11
Senior female	7	3	0	3	13
Senior male	5	1	6	4	16
Subtotal female	12	7	0	6	26
Subtotal male	9	5	9	4	27
Total	21	12	9	10	53

Table 1. Gender distribution of CSTT members according to team and seniority

After 2016, a distinction was made between members and associate members, primarily related to funding and responsibilities for the Centre of Excellence. Researchers were free to choose whether they wanted to be full or associate members. It should be noted that the distribution of full and associate members visible on the website only records the situation at the end of the funding period and is not valid for the entire period of 2016–2019. According to CSTT’s website, there were fifteen associate members, meaning that thirty-eight researchers were considered full members.¹⁰ Among the associate members, seven are identified as male scholars, while eight are identified as female scholars. In the Academy of Finland report, funding is described according to units measuring the amount of time spent at work, termed *person-months*. Over the entire life of CSTT, the program funded 1,097 person-months. Of the 1,097 person-months funded by CSTT, 354 (32.3 percent) went to female scholars, while 743 (67.7 percent) went to male scholars.¹¹ This funding disparity is particularly obvious considering the overall gender balance seen in the membership, both full and associate. Clearly, examining membership, operational leadership, and governance alone does not tell the full story of gendered structures within CSTT. Further investigation beyond

10. The website lists thirty-seven full members because a female researcher who revoked her membership does not appear there.

11. Martti Nissinen, “Presentation at CSTT Concluding Meeting”—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svård, and Tervanotko, Dataset). The numbers in the presentation are not exact final numbers, because the presentation dates to October 2019.

the scope of this chapter could include examining the ratio of male and female members who held positions or funding outside of the structures of CSTT, the number of requests made for research and conference travel by male and female scholars, and the percentage of these applications that were approved. Nevertheless, this ratio indicates a negative outcome with respect to gender equality despite clear efforts to remain gender-balanced in research personnel, leadership positions, and the governance body.

In addition to the membership, CSTT welcomed a number of guests for research visits. Because the invitation and funding of these stays reflect decisions made by team leaders and the board, it is important to also consider this information in the picture. A total of eleven scholars visited Helsinki for some extended research stays with the CSTT. Of these eleven, five were women and six were men.¹² There was also a separate CSTT lecture series, wherein long-standing members and guests alike were invited to give lectures on special topics of relevance to the Centre of Excellence. The gender representation among these lecturers was nine men to one woman.¹³ It is clear that, as is the case with the funding opportunities, men significantly outnumber women in this category. It is not immediately obvious how the decisions were made that led to these results.

Gender	Visiting scholars	CSTT lecturers	Total
Female scholars	5	1	6
Male scholars	6	9	15
Total	11	10	21

Table 2. Gender distribution of visiting scholars and CSTT lecturers¹⁴

For the events sponsored by CSTT, there was a concerted effort to distribute responsibilities for planning, organizing, and hosting among members of all ranks and genders. These responsibilities included decisions on which scholars to invite as keynote speakers, what topics to

12. “Visiting Scholars”—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

13. “Events”—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

14. Statistics regarding the visitors reveal thirty-two months for male scholars against nineteen months for female scholars. “Visiting Scholars”—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

discuss, and on the format participation should take. So, when examining the gender distribution of keynote speakers and short paper presenters and panelists at all CSTT events, it is important to note that the results emerge out of a consciously structurally equitable process. The six annual meetings of CSTT are a useful sample for investigating the outcomes of such a process. These were the only plenary CSTT events over the course of the Centre of Excellence's existence, and they are the only events that reflect the will of a representative cross-section of CSTT from all academic ranks and teams. For the keynote presentations at these events, which were typically (though not always) given by guests invited from outside the roster of CSTT members, nine were delivered by men, and seven by women. For short papers and panel appearances, which were considerably more numerous and typically delivered by CSTT members, fifty-eight presentations were made by male scholars, while only thirty-three were delivered by female scholars.

While these numbers show a relatively equitable gender distribution among the keynote presentations, they display disparity among short paper and panel appearances. The second group is disconcerting considering the overall gender distribution of CSTT, which is nearly equal. The reasons for this disparity are not immediately clear. It could relate to the fact that while the keynote speakers were invited, the short presentations were given on a more voluntary basis and, thus, the gender balance was more difficult to manage. Underrepresentation among short paper and panel appearances may correlate with data from the wider world of academia suggesting that women are often asked to perform more professional service, contribute more writing, and are saddled with more domestic responsibilities than their male counterparts and therefore are not equally able to avail themselves of opportunities.¹⁵ Although there is no evidence that this is the case with the CSTT, uneven distribution of opportunities is a well-documented phenomenon in academia.¹⁶ It may also correlate with some evidence

15. Cassandra M. Guarino and Victor M. H. Borden, "Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?," *Research in Higher Education* 58 (2017): 672–94. For gender and mobility, see, e.g., Minna Nikunen and Kirsti Lempiäinen, "Gendered Strategies of Mobility and Academic Career," *Gender and Education* 32 (2020): 554–71.

16. For uneven distribution of opportunities, see, e.g., Jamie Lundine et al., "The Gendered System of Academic Publishing," *Lancet* 391 (2018): 1754–56, demonstrate how "despite growing numbers of women in the research workforce, most authors,

that female scholars are conditioned to take fewer risks and present only thoroughly worked-out material.¹⁷ Whatever the cause, it appears special attention needs to be paid to ensuring that more women in research projects like this can present their work to their peers.

Gender	Keynote presentations	Short papers and panel appearances	Total
Female scholars	7	33	40
Male scholars	9	58	67
Total	16	91	107

Table 3. Gender distribution of CSTT annual meeting presentations

When examining the way in which the structure of CSTT impacts gender representation and outcomes, it is helpful to also include some context for the numbers and ratios related to gender. There is no perfect comparison for these, as CSTT was primarily (though not exclusively) composed of scholars of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, early Judaism, and the ancient Near East. The academic societies that compile this type of information are typically either more or less focused than this selection of disciplines. However, the membership statistics of the Society of Biblical Literature may serve as a fairly good comparison. It is a society that includes members from around the world and from all disciplines represented in CSTT. It also runs an annual meeting in which members of CSTT were particularly active. It does include a large number of scholars of New Testament and early Christianity, which are poorly represented among CSTT members, but that should not skew the numbers too much.

peer reviewers, and editors at academic journals are men.” For instance, in 2012, *Nature* journal reported that 14 percent of its peer reviewers were women. Even if one focuses on a female-dominated field of science, such as gynecology, the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology* reveals that just 34 percent of its editorial board members were women between 2002 and 2008. We are unaware of such systematic analyses in the field of biblical studies.

17. There are a lot of studies that discuss risk taking but none of them speaks directly about research. Also, what is perceived of as a risk varies. Yet, the previous points about fewer opportunities may speak about extra caution that women need to exercise when accepting offers to present their works. Also, it is possible that negative gender stereotypes prevent women from presenting their ideas. See, e.g., Pedro Bordalo et al., “Beliefs about Gender,” *American Economic Review* 109 (2019): 739–73.

The Society of Biblical Literature data are drawn annually from information provided in membership profiles. The most pertinent data come from January 2019 and are the result of a 67 percent response rate on the membership profile questionnaire. According to the Society of Biblical Literature, there were 8,324 members in the most recent survey. About 53 percent of all respondents, 4,774 people, were faculty at a college or university. Just 15 percent of respondents were students, and 8 percent religious leaders, presumably clergy of various sorts (see table 4).

Occupation	Percentage
Faculty	53
Student	15
Religious Leaders	8
Administrator	5
Independent Scholar	5
Publishing Employee	1
Teacher	1
Other	12

Table 4. Society of Biblical Literature membership profiles

Among faculty, 2,275 people, or 47 percent had full time tenured or tenure-track positions, while an additional 1,064 or 22 percent were in full time positions that lack the security of tenure. Seventeen percent of faculty were in postdoctoral, part-time, and contingent positions. The remainder of responses, circa 14 percent, were made up by retired and unemployed faculty.

Tenured or tenure-track	47
Full-time	22
Postdoctoral, part-time, and contingent	17
Retired and unemployed	14

Table 5. SBL members who work as faculty

Once this data is broken down by gender, a distinct pattern emerges. 3,207 faculty members, 75 percent of all those who responded to the ques-

tion, were male. 1,509 full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members, again 75 percent of respondents, were men. 77 percent of all full time non-tenured faculty members were men. Only when one turns to the part-time, contingent, and term positions do the gender breakdowns become slightly more equal. There, part-time faculty are only 67 percent male, contingent faculty are only 72 percent male, and faculty in postdoctoral positions are identified as men merely 60 percent of the time.¹⁸

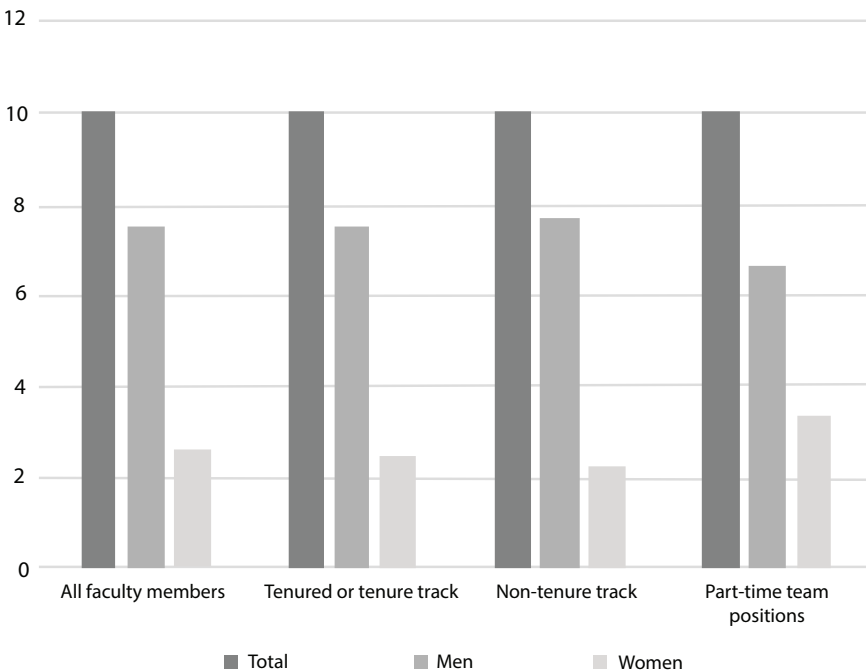


Fig. 1. Society of Biblical Literature members who work as faculty

It is also useful to compare CSTT with information from Finland. Academia in Finland is statistically unequal. Although half of the new PhD students are women, only 33.2 percent of professors are female, and

18. It should be noted that between 2013 and 2019 membership of women in the Society of Biblical Literature remained unchanged. Only about a quarter of all Society of Biblical Literature members are women. See the “SBL Membership Reports 2013–2019” in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svård, and Tervanotko, Dataset). Especially see the latest data from the year 2019, p. 5.

they are less well paid than male professors.¹⁹ It is therefore remarkable that CSTT was able to have such an equal representation in all categories of members. Statistically, one would have expected the team leaders and senior members to be mostly male and only PhD students and junior scholars to be more equal in proportion.

By all of these measures, CSTT comes out as a more inclusive group than the field at large with respect to gender equality. With nearly equal numbers of female and male scholars overall and at each of the doctoral and more senior levels (postdoctoral, researcher, and professor), CSTT performs admirably in its personnel decisions. CSTT shows how a large research group can be an engine for change within the field by creating a truly equitable research network. However, when one recalls that 67 per cent of funding went to male scholars within CSTT, despite the inclusivity in other respects, it is clear that there are some ways in which the Centre of Excellence reproduced inequalities found elsewhere in the field.

The trend that emerges from this examination of CSTT's institutional structure is that the Centre of Excellence performed very well on measures of gender inclusivity in its membership, leadership, and the ex-officio and elected parts of its governance structure. According to the CSTT procedures, when voting, eligible for voting were the director and team leaders, and when a team leader was absent the team vice leader. When votes are even the Chairman's vote was decisive.²⁰ CSTT also was gender inclusive in its invitations to external scholars for research and speaking engagements. However, the appointment of vice leaders disrupted gender balance both in leadership positions and (where relevant) in governance. There was also a clear gender inequity observed in distribution of funding among the members of CSTT. Most strikingly, large gender disparities were observed in the opportunities for members to present to their peers in the context of the CSTT lecture series and at CSTT annual meetings. The overall picture is one of an institution that was exceptionally gender

19. See the study made by the Finnish Union of University Professors "Palkkaselvitykset 2021"—see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset). For other studies on gender and academia in Finland, see Kirsti Lempiäinen, "Akateeminen työ, toimijuus ja sukupuoli," in *Eriarvoisuuden rakenteet: Haurastuvat työmarkkinat Suomessa*, ed. Kirsti Lempiäinen and Tiina Silvasti (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2014), 159–83.

20. "CSTT procedures"—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

inclusive with structural decisions (i.e., membership, leadership, governance, and guests) but reproduced the inequalities found throughout the field of biblical studies with respect to discretionary decisions (i.e., vice leadership, funding, and speaking opportunities). This may show that elevated levels of attention and encouragement, beyond an equitable structure, are necessary for equitable outcomes in these latter categories.

15.2.2. Scholarly Output

In order to best assess how gender appeared as a relevant framework of study within CSTT, this section examines three related sets of data. First, the number and type of events hosted by CSTT (in full or in part) that concentrated upon gender are discussed in the context of all of the CSTT events. Second, the number and type of papers and panels focusing on gender at CSTT annual meetings are examined. Third, the number and type of publications produced by members of CSTT using gender as a primary lens of analysis are investigated. This section closes with a reflection on the overall picture, and some thoughts on what the results reveal about the Centre of Excellence's epistemological priorities.

According to the CSTT website, the Centre of Excellence hosted or cohosted sixty separate events over its six-year life.²¹ One of those events was the combined International Meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies and Society of Biblical Literature in 2018. As this was a large meeting over which CSTT could exercise little control in terms of contents, it is excluded from the analysis. This leaves fifty-nine events. These include the six annual meetings, one final meeting, two summer meetings, and the ten public lectures in the CSTT lecture series, all of which were plenary events, ostensibly open to all members. The remaining forty events are a mix of workshops, masterclasses, conferences, activist events, and mentorship activities. Except for the two voluntary activist events, these were often limited to a smaller number of members, either by application, team membership, or some other criterion.

Among the nineteen plenary events hosted by CSTT, four featured at least one paper or session examining material from the perspective of gender. Three annual meetings, at Sannäs (2018), Tvärminne (2017), and

21. "Events"—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

Saariselkä (2016), combined for three papers and one panel devoted to topics related to gender.²² In addition, one CSTT lecture approached Near Eastern material from a gender studies perspective. Eight events among the remaining forty smaller workshops and conferences also featured scholarship informed by gender studies. Two of these were activist events devoted to creating or improving Wikipedia entries for women in the Bible and women in the ancient world more broadly.²³ One was a women's writing retreat devoted to collaborative writing, networking, and career development.²⁴ Two workshops centered on gender, methodology, and the ancient Near East.²⁵ The remaining three events were a conference featuring one paper related to gender studies, a colloquium in which two papers touched on the topic, and a symposium in which four papers directly engaged with questions related to gender.²⁶ It is notable that the majority of the events featuring gender in some way did not focus on the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity, the main theme of CSTT. Rather, gendered events were often related to the ancient Near East. We elaborate on this observation more below. It is also important to recognize that many of the contributions related to gender at these events came from academic communities beyond CSTT.

22. For full programs of these meetings, see the dataset for the article, "CSTT Annual Meeting Programs" in our online repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

23. Organized twice, 10 March 2017 and 8 March 2018. Please see "Wikipedia-edit-a-thon" in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

24. "Women's Academia: Writing Retreat and Career Development Seminar for the CSTT Women," 15–18 December 2018. Please see "Writing retreat for women" in our online repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

25. Organized 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022. See "GeMANE" in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

26. Religion and Empire in the First Century BCE Levant (2016), Fifth Finnish Colloquium of Middle East and North Africa Studies (2017), and Summer Symposium on the Construction of Identity in the Ancient Near East (2017). See "Summer Symposium" in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset).

Event Type	No gender scholarship	Some gender scholarship	All gender scholarship	Total
Plenary	15	3	1	19
Focused	32	3	5	40
Total	47	6	6	59

Table 6. Gender scholarship in CSTT-sponsored events

As mentioned above, CSTT annual meetings accounted for just four papers or panels committed to an examination of gender or a gender studies perspective. One paper and response at the Saariselkä annual meeting (2016) appeared as part of a session devoted to identity in the ancient world. Both the paper's author and the respondent were women.²⁷ The paper examined the intersection of gender and identity as relevant categories in first-millennium Mesopotamia. The session was not plenary, as it focused on cooperation and overlapping themes between Teams 1 and 4.

During the 2017 CSTT annual meeting at Tvärminne, the members of the Centre more consciously reflected gendered aspects of their work. First, the meeting had a plenary paper authored by a woman investigating the interactions between values related to purity and masculinity.²⁸ Second, five speakers (three women and two men) spoke about various topics related to gender in their scholarship. One paper examined the gendering of materials that takes place in archaeological analysis. Another focused on a career autobiography of a woman scholar. A third paper offered a metacriticism of a certain set of historical-critical methods from the perspective of gender studies. A fourth paper discussed methodological questions related to gender in the field of Assyriology.²⁹ The papers received a brief response from one of the keynote speakers that year. The panel stimulated discussion about the status of feminist and gender studies in the field of

27. Saana Svärd, "Gender and Identity in First Millennium Mesopotamia" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of CSTT: Change? Saariselkä, 7–10 April 2016). Respondent to the paper was Hanna Tervanotko.

28. Jessica Keady, "Troubling the Purity Tradition: The Positions of Idealism, Impurity, and Masculinities in the Dead Sea Scrolls" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of CSTT: Tradition, Tvärminne, 10–13 May 2017).

29. The papers are available in Zenodo: Saana Svärd, Hanna Tervanotko, and Rick Bonnie, eds., "CSTT and Gender," Centre of Excellence in Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions, released 28 September 2017, doi:10.5281/zenodo.998281.

biblical studies and related fields. In addition, the autobiographical presentation of the CSTT member in particular raised questions about the field's equity and inclusiveness.³⁰ This conversation about gender and methodology continued at Sannäs (2018). Members of two CSTT teams presented a coauthored paper examining ways in which textual criticism and gender studies could be productively combined.³¹ The authors of the presentation were men. Outside of these events, gender was almost entirely absent as an analytical category at CSTT annual meetings.

Turning toward publications produced by members of CSTT during the life of the Centre of Excellence, the picture remains relatively consistent. The final report CSTT submitted to the Academy of Finland, which does not provide a complete picture, lists nearly 650 publications of all types being produced by members of the Centre of Excellence.³² Of these, thirty-six dealt with topics directly related to gender as an object of inquiry and/or used gender as a framework for studying material. As that is about 5 percent of all publications, we can see that gender was not well incorporated into research within the CSTT. Also, significantly, the vast majority (twenty-seven) of these thirty-six pieces came from just three scholars. The remaining nine can be traced to only four more scholars. So, in total seven members of CSTT are reported to have published work approaching material from a gendered perspective. These include three monographs, seven journal articles, thirteen book chapters, five book reviews, two handbook articles, two encyclopedia entries, one edited journal volume, one edited book, one handbook, and one popular article. All in all, taking into consideration all publications CSTT members produced, studies that addressed gender remained few. The low number of scholars engaging with gender and subsequently the small number of publications (*vis-à-vis* other areas of research) speak of a gender approach not being fully integrated into the broader field of biblical studies.³³

30. The present chapter directly connects with that session and is an outcome of the conversation that began in 2017, as all three authors also participated in the panel.

31. See the chapter by Timo Tekoniemi and Patrik Jansson in this volume ("Textual Criticism meets Gender Criticism: The Characterization and Interactions of Elijah, Jezebel, and Ahab").

32. "Bibliographical section of the final report of CSTT"—please see our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset). The publication list is not exhaustive, as more publications originating from CSTT came out after completion of the report.

33. The relationship between gender studies and other biblical studies is discussed

15.3. Cross-Disciplinary Gender Studies in CSTT

In this section, we will first outline how gender studies have developed both in the field of biblical studies and in ancient Near East studies. Following that, we will explore more in detail how gender studies in the context of CSTT align with the larger framework of gender studies in both fields.

15.3.1. History of Gender/Feminist Studies

Feminist biblical studies go back to the beginning of the feminist movement in the late 1800s. The first scholar to address feminist matters was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who addressed the political climate of her time in the 1800s and biblical interpretation. Advocating equality between men and women, Cady Stanton asked if the Bible was used as a tool to silence women and to legitimize women's inferiority to men. In Cady Stanton's view, this contradicted the concept of a just and fair divine being that treats all humans equally. This first group of feminist biblical scholars, called the first wave, analyzed women's presence in the biblical texts and published *The Women's Bible*, where this topic is addressed.³⁴

Like the first wave of the feminist movement, the political agendas of the second and third waves inspired biblical scholarship as well.³⁵ The second wave of the feminist movement, often dated to the 1960s and 1970s, added more topics to the discussion of women's rights, addressing, for instance, women's employment, equality issues within a family, and reproductive rights. These topics are reflected in feminist biblical studies that analyze whether women are present in the texts even if they are not explicitly mentioned. As biblical texts seldom speak about women explicitly, scholars have inquired if texts that seemingly focus on other topics can reveal something about women's roles and status. The third wave of the

more in detail in Hanna Tervanotko, "The Pseudepigrapha and Gender," in *Studying the Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL*, ed. Matthias Henze and Liv Ingeborg Lied, EJL 50 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 175–202.

34. See *The Women's Bible* for the complete list of authors. Further, e.g., Tervanotko, "Pseudepigrapha and Gender."

35. For second-wave feminist biblical scholarship, see e.g., Sara Parks, Shayna Sheinfeld, and Meredith Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 2022), 97–99. For an overview of the third wave see Parks, Sheinfeld, and Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women*, 99–101.

feminist movement started in the early 1990s and continues to the present. Typically, it does not focus only on women and does not support a single unified approach to gender. Rather, recent feminist scholarship highlights the intersectionality of gender and proposes that gender must be studied with intersecting vectors of social identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and age. The significance of different vectors of identity evolves in connection with each other.

In the field of ancient Near Eastern studies, the effect of the three waves is more difficult to trace. There has been an increase in the study of women in Mesopotamia since the 1970s.³⁶ This trend is continuing. As for many historical periods, archives, and corpora, the basic work of outlining the extent of evidence for the lives of women is still not done. The second wave studies discussed the ancient Near East fairly extensively, particularly in the search for the “original matriarchy.”³⁷ However, the second-wave discussions centering on equality, reproduction, and power structures did not reach the field of ancient Near Eastern studies itself, not even as explicit studies rejecting the work of women’s history. When the field finally took a more active interest in the feminist agenda and/or gender studies (from the 1990s onward), it already made more sense to use the more refined ideas and theories related to third-wave studies. This led to a situation where ancient Near Eastern studies feature publications that aim at writing women into history and at the same time research that discusses intersectionality and third-wave approaches like masculinity studies, but very little research on second-wave themes.³⁸

The study of gender in both biblical studies and in ancient Near Eastern studies is thus connected with the agenda of feminist scholarship. However, there is some hesitancy to discuss the feminist agenda of this field of studies. It is possible that many scholars still consider aspects

36. Julia Asher-Greve, “Women and Gender in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures: Bibliography 1885 to 2001 AD,” *NIN: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 3 (2002): 33–114. See also, Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Gioele Zisa, “Gender and Women in Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Bibliography 2002–2016,” *Akkadica* 138 (2017): 37–67.

37. Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982); Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

38. Saana Svård, “Studying Gender: A Case Study of Female Administrators in Neo-Assyrian Palaces,” in *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel, SANER 13 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 447–58.

related to gender, often viewed as a part of social identity, more suitable for research into the social aspects of the texts but not so much for the more traditional areas of research such as text criticism and literary criticism.³⁹ One explanation for this could be the hesitancy to engage with the political agenda of gender studies. Concerning the challenges to fit gender studies within the traditional fields of biblical studies, Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman have argued that “this is likely due to a perception of feminist or gender theory and method as politicized for the purposes of presentist concerns, historians preferring to view their inquiry as inherently disinterested.”⁴⁰ Some recent works in biblical studies highlight the significance of feminist historiography that “poses questions which patriarchal historiographies cannot answer.”⁴¹ Meanwhile, in the field of ancient Near East studies, the term *feminist studies* has been avoided, often in favor of *women's history*. The reasons for this are similar as in biblical studies—the desire to detach research from feminist agenda and acquire a more objective position from which to view gender.⁴² The authors of the current chapter follow the tradition that does not believe in the possibility of completely objective scientific inquiry and suggests that being open and reflective about our own bias (in our case feminist bias) is the most fruitful way forward.

15.3.2. Gender Studies in CSTT

In what follows, we further assess observations made above regarding gender-related events and publications in CSTT by situating them in the larger discussions and trends in gender studies—both in the field of ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies.

When analyzing the work of the CSTT members who investigate gender, one can note that they often take into consideration a broader

39. By *traditional* we mean methods that have been established for longer.

40. Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman, “Introduction: What Is Gendered Historiography and How to Do It?” *JHebS* 19 (2019): 4.

41. Blossom Stefaniw, “Feminist Historiography and Uses of the Past,” *SLA* 4 (2020): 260–83.

42. Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Saana Svärd, “Theoretical Approaches, Gender, and the Ancient Near East: An Introduction,” in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 6–8.

range of texts than only the biblical corpus. Examples of this are Jessica Keady and Hanna Tervanotko, who analyze gender in early Jewish texts, and Martti Nissinen and Saana Svärd, whose scholarship addresses gender in ancient Mesopotamian texts. While analyzing the texts, the members of the CSTT align with the goals of both the second- and the third-wave feminist movements. Often they make use of historical-critical methodology and consciously place the texts in their ancient historical-cultural contexts. While doing so, they inquire about the role and status of men and women in the ancient worlds and highlight the importance of characters that have been perceived as marginal figures.

Often, lines of inquiry from different waves can be detected in the work of a single author as well. The work of Svärd has focused on examining Mesopotamian women based on the primary sources in Akkadian language. Much of her work has focused on writing women into history in the Neo-Assyrian era (following the tradition of first-wave studies), but there is a definite trend toward third-wave studies as well.⁴³

Furthermore, questions that align with the goals of the third-wave feminist movement concern different types of identities. Examples of this are Keady's and Nissinen's studies on masculinities and Nissinen's work on biblical masculinities and sexuality.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Svärd and Tervanotko have analyzed women's authority in antiquity and female leadership.⁴⁵

43. Compare Saana Svärd, *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, SAAS 23 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2015) with Svärd, "Studying Gender." For a study of fluidity of gender borders, see also Saana Svärd and Martti Nissinen, "(Re)constructing the Image of the *assinnu*," in *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 373–411.

44. See, e.g., Martti Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (New York: Routledge, 2017), 221–47; Nissinen, "Male Agencies in the Song of Songs," in *Biblical Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, Hebrew Bible Monographs 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 251–73; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Jessica Keady, "Reviewing Purity and Impurity from a Gendered Perspective: *The War Scroll* (1QM) as a Case Study," in *Scripture as Social Discourse*, ed. Jessica M. Keady, Todd E. Klutz, and C. E. Strine (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 149–58.

45. Svärd, *Women and Power*; Hanna Tervanotko, "'Obey Me Like Your Mother': Deborah's Leadership in Light of *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 33," *JSP* 24 (2015): 301–23; Tervanotko, "'The Princess Did Provide All Things, as Though I Were Her

Finally, the CSTT and gender publication can be seen as an example of metacritical reflections of the field of biblical studies. The shift to study *gender* instead of *women* can also be seen as a methodological emphasis, which aligns with the paradigms of present-day gender studies.⁴⁶

Two CSTT-sponsored events stand out as significant in the field of Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern studies: the first and second workshop on Gender and Methodology and the Ancient Near East (GeMANE). These events, held in 2014 in Helsinki and in 2017 in Barcelona, managed to consolidate a research community for the topic and have advanced the field considerably in this respect. The third GeMANE workshop was held in Ghent in 2019, the fourth was a virtual event in Helsinki in 2021, and the fifth was a hybrid event in Helsinki in 2022. A sixth is scheduled for 2024.⁴⁷ The community around these workshops has managed to be inclusive and to have presentations that can be labeled first, second, and third-wave studies from the fields of Assyriology, Egyptology, archaeology, art history, and biblical studies.

At the same time, it seems that CSTT made its major impact on gender studies within ancient Near Eastern studies, not in biblical studies. In contrast to the interdisciplinary nature of gender studies, it is notable that the majority of the events featuring gender in some way did not focus on the main theme of the CSTT, the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity. In the context of CSTT annual meetings, gender in relation to the Bible or biblical texts was the subject of study only once.⁴⁸ It is also important to recognize that many of the contributions related to gender in workshops and conferences came from scholars who were not members of CSTT (see above, §15.2.2). There are some possible historical reasons for this. One

Own' (Exagoge 37–38): Reading Exodus 2 in the Late Second Temple Era," in *Early Jewish Writings*, vol. 3.1 of *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 143–64.

46. Also see Jutta Jokiranta and Jessica Keady, eds., *Gender Studies and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, DSD 26.3. Further, Susanna Asikainen and Elisa Uusimäki, eds., *Sukupuoli Raamatun maailmassa*, PFES 117 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2019).

47. Two reports of workshops have been published: Katrien De Graef et al., "Third Workshop on Gender, Methodology, and the Ancient Near East: Enhancing Networking and Consolidating an Initiative," *NEA* 82 (2019): 186–89; Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Saana Svärd "Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East: First Steps and Future Prospects," *NEA* 79 (2016): 222–23.

48. Tekoniemi and Jansson in this volume.

can say that the historical-critical method has dominated biblical studies in Helsinki for long. Recently, different scholars have pointed out how the historical-critical approach deems itself value neutral. Thus, it is not surprising that the CSTT researchers whose research questions are close to the areas of studies where historical-critical methods have been emphasized, that is, Teams 2 and 3, were less active in using gender approaches than members of Teams 1 and 4.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, we cannot say that the CSTT members would have rejected these approaches as some CSTT affiliated scholars have participated in the discussion demonstrating the significance of gender studies for text criticism.⁵⁰ Rather, it takes longer to establish a research tradition.

On a more general level, we would like to highlight the way CSTT facilitated cross-disciplinary gender studies. As outlined above, the topic of gender was present in three annual meetings of CSTT: Saariselkä (2016), Tvärminne (2017), and Sannäs (2018). From a scholarly perspective, the presentations and events in these three meetings present a cohesive narrative. Discussions in Saariselkä focused on finding common ground between biblical scholarship (Tervanotko) and Assyriology (Svärd).⁵¹ Fruits of the ideas that were sown in 2016 were reaped at the 2017 annual meeting in Tvärminne, where a plenary paper and a full session with five speakers engaged with topics related to gender.⁵² The topics and results of the Tvärminne meeting were interesting from a scholarly perspective: archaeology, historical critical methods, and Assyriology were all approached from a gender perspective in the same session. A fourth paper addressed gender

49. However, see Francis Borchardt, "A Gender Theory Critique of the Historical-Critical Method," in Svärd, Tervanotko, and Bonnie, "CSTT and Gender," 5–14; and Tekoniemi and Jansson in this volume.

50. See, Kristin De Troyer, "Septuagint and Gender Studies: The Very Beginning of a Promising Liason," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 326–34; Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Corruption or Correction? Textual Development in the MT of 1 Samuel 1," in *Textual Criticism and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Julio Trebolle: Florilegium Complutense*, ed. Andrés Piquer Otero and Pablo A. Torijano Morales, JSJSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–17.

51. Svärd, "Gender and Identity." Respondent to the paper was Hanna Tervanotko.

52. The plenary paper was by Jessica Keady, "Troubling the Purity Tradition." For the panel of five speakers, see the full program of the Tvärminne meeting: "CSTT Annual Meeting Programs" in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svärd, and Tervanotko, Dataset) and Svärd, Tervanotko, and Bonnie, "CSTT and Gender."

in academia and raised issues of gender equality as an important aspect of research philosophy in the field. The fourth paper stimulated further discussions about equality. It is also remarkable that the discussions on equality were an important part of CSTT life in general, not just another paper or a separate area of discussion.

Usually, these four perspectives are present in a single scholarly event only at very large conferences, such as the Society of Biblical Literature's. It is remarkable that the small CSTT annual meeting formed a scholarly environment that could foster such a cross-disciplinary perspective on gender. Not only were all four topics (i.e., archaeology, historical-critical methods, Assyriology, and research philosophy) addressed in the meeting independently, but the ambitious aim of the session was also to find common ground between them. In other words, all members of CSTT and participants of the annual meetings representing different academic disciplines were encouraged to participate in these interdisciplinary discussions. Thus, CSTT meetings facilitate an interdisciplinary exchange on gender studies.

There were other CSTT events where gender was visible,⁵³ but they merely reinforce the image conveyed by the annual meetings: as a scholarly community, gender studies acted as an arena that could connect distinct scholarly traditions and where members thought joint projects could and should be fostered. These endeavors can also be seen in the later events and publications. Presentations from the session in the CSTT 2017 annual meeting were made available via Zenodo,⁵⁴ and this chapter directly connects with that session, as all three authors participated on the panel.

53. For instance, in the annual meeting at Sannäs 2018 (see the program in "CSTT Annual Meeting Programs" in our online data repository [Borchardt, Svård, and Tervanotko, Dataset]); Tekoniemi and Jansson in this volume; CSTT lecture approached Near Eastern material from a gender studies perspective. CSTT sponsored two workshops centered on gender, methodology, and the Ancient Near East; a conference featuring one paper related to gender studies ("Religion and Empire in the First Century BCE Levant," 2016), a colloquium in which two papers touched on the topic (Fifth Finnish Colloquium of Middle East and North Africa Studies, 2017), and a symposium in which four papers directly engaged with questions related to gender (Summer Symposium on the Construction of Identity in the Ancient Near East, 2017; see the program in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svård, and Tervanotko, Dataset, file "Summer Symposium"). CSTT also sponsored a writing retreat for women (see the program in our online data repository (Borchardt, Svård, and Tervanotko, Dataset, file "Writing retreat for women").

54. Svård, Tervanotko, and Bonnie, "CSTT and Gender."

The cross-disciplinary approach within the CSTT community went against the larger trends of gender studies/feminist studies. As outlined above, during and after the third wave the field of gender studies fragmented into smaller and smaller subdisciplines. Gender archaeology, visual studies and gender, Assyriology and gender, biblical studies and gender—all these subfields share certain methodological insights from general gender studies but rarely cross-pollinate in conferences or publications.

These observations strengthen the points raised above: Interdisciplinarity of gender studies within the CSTT is evident. The scholars of CSTT employed gender as an analytical category for archaeological finds, Assyriology, a scholarly autobiography, metacriticism of a method, and the rules of the Qumran community. The lens of gender has been used for analyzing different materials. CSTT scholars used gender as an analytical tool more often to analyze new areas of research such as new material and the social history of the texts.

15.4. Conclusions

This study has highlighted how gender emerged in the organizational structure of the CSTT and in its collective scholarly activities. By investigating the CSTT as an organization, we analyzed its practices including its membership, structures, and scientific program. When examining the CSTT as a locus of scholarly research and production, we discovered that equity was an important principle for the leadership, and it guided many of the decisions taken by the governing bodies. At the same time, our study aligns with and adds to other analyses that have revealed how there are still challenges to making academic organizations equally inclusive for men and women. Research communities will need to continuously address those challenges in order to make workplaces equitable.

Concerning the scholarly output of the CSTT members, the community contributed to studying gender from an interdisciplinary perspective. Also, the studies of gender carried out in the framework of CSTT follow larger international trends and reflect the long-standing traditions at the University of Helsinki, such as interest in new material findings. Nonetheless, studies that focus on gender or use gender as a method remain few when all scholarly contributions of the CSTT members are taken into consideration.

Gender was important in CSTT, both in the effort to create a good working environment and in its scholarly accomplishments. Gender as

a category demands great attention from a project's leadership, and it is necessary to be vigilant about policies as well as topics of study. At the same time, attention paid to gender issues will enable a better working environment, a more equal research community, and potentially groundbreaking research results in interdisciplinary work on gender. Focus on gender is a way to achieve better outcomes for scholars and a possibility to bring scholars from various fields together to discuss shared topics and concerns.

As this chapter has been written from an insider's perspective, we should make it clear that for all of us CSTT was a particularly good research community that contributed much to our scholarly growth. Our reason for writing the article is precisely because we think CSTT would be a good model for other projects in many respects—both from the angle of a systematic approach to building an equal community and from the angle of fostering research on gender. Comparison with the Society of Biblical Literature data and statistics from Finland demonstrated the successes of CSTT. At the same time, there is no data or research (to our knowledge) regarding any other major international project that would offer a point of comparison for our study here. CSTT thought through and spelled out its policies and rules of procedure more transparently than any other project before it—and still, the result is not perfect. Overall, there are very few concrete case studies on research communities or projects that would take the point of view that we have taken in our study. We hope that the study will increase knowledge on gender and gender research, which will help us move forward in the fields of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies.

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Part 4

Reflections

16

The Bible and the Humanities and the Social Sciences

George J. Brooke

This chapter is written to encourage many of those engaged in the study of the Bible to write about their research findings so that they might be taken seriously and engaged with by scholars in other disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. This chapter cannot cover all the possibilities for how biblical studies might set itself alongside other disciplines, and it is not a call simply for more interdisciplinarity in the methods and approaches used by biblical scholars, though interdisciplinarity is a significant feature of much of biblical studies. The intention here is to be suggestive, even programmatic, but not to offer a full range of paradigms for the role or development of biblical studies within the academy. Not only would such an endeavor in a few thousand words be full of gross generalizations, but it could in no way cover the full range of possibilities that might be involved, given the wide range of subdisciplinary interests that the field encourages. The argument here is that study of the Bible needs to become once again part of the study of the humanities and social sciences, offering much for other disciplines to consider and interacting responsibly with relevant developments in cognate areas.¹

The argument here thus gives priority to the study of the Bible as a cultural phenomenon rather than as a resource for faith communities, whether Christian or Jewish. Philip Davies's *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?* is indicative of why biblical studies should not be the exclusive domain of

1. Such has been the case in multiple fruitful ways in the recent Centre of Excellence on Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) (2014–2019) at the University of Helsinki. The continuation of some aspects of the dynamism of the CSTT in the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires (2018–2025) is indicative of how biblical studies can have significant influence in other fields of the humanities.

religious groups; in a similar vein Jonathan Sheehan has provided insight into how Protestant scholars of the eighteenth century adjusted the Bible from being a theological tome to being a cultural phenomenon.² It can readily be argued that even those with ongoing concerns for the Bible's religious importance should be comfortable with positioning much of the study of the Bible within the broader cultural frame of the humanities.

The history of biblical studies has been told many times. Such histories seem to take one of three forms, though often there are overlapping concerns. First, there are many volumes that describe the history of the Bible. Although many dictionaries of the Bible contain articles on the history of its interpretation, histories of the Bible provide comprehensive surveys on its character and its use and abuse through the ages. Something of the changing landscape in the presentation of the history of the Bible and how it has been studied can be seen in the differences between the original *Cambridge History of the Bible* and its more recent updating as the *New Cambridge History of the Bible*.³ Those differences lie chiefly in the greater specificity of the contributions in the newer volumes; more than a generation of study has provided a range of fresh insights and approaches, though the specificity is in part the result of the ongoing fragmentation of knowledge. Among those fresh approaches, there is an increasing interdisciplinarity, which, from the perspective of this essay, is to be warmly welcomed.⁴ The larger aspiration, however, should be for

2. Philip R. Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

3. Peter. R. Ackroyd and Christopher F. Evans, eds., *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible*; Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, ed., *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible*; Stanley L. Greenslade, ed., *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 1969, 1963, respectively). Revised in four volumes: James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper, eds., *From the Beginnings to 600*, vol. 1 of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*; Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter, eds., *From 600 to 1450*, vol. 2 of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*; Euan Cameron, ed., *From 1450 to 1750*, vol. 3 of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*; John Riches, ed., *From 1750 to the Present*, vol. 4 of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 2018, 2016, 2015, respectively). Other publishing houses have engaged in similar ventures.

4. See Patricia Kolaiti, *The Limits of Expression: Language, Literature, Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); chapter 7 is on cognitive theory in interdisciplinarity.

other disciplines to take into account what is taking place in biblical studies and for disciplines across the humanities and social sciences to adjust their approaches as the latest insights from the study of the Bible are incorporated into developments in their own fields from classical studies to the cognitive sciences.

Second, there are studies dedicated particularly to the history of the interpretation of the Bible. A landmark study of this kind was offered by Beryl Smalley over half a century ago.⁵ The four-volume history by Henning Graf Reventlow is also a remarkable achievement.⁶ However, extensive studies on the history of the interpretation of the Bible are usually collaborative endeavors, since few scholars can control all the minutiae of two millennia.⁷ The field of the history of biblical interpretation has slowly been transformed into the study of the history of the Bible's reception, and that is now internationally exemplified in the ongoing project of the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* and its accompanying book series.⁸

A third approach to the description of the history of biblical studies has been a concern to prioritize the insights and methods of the most notable scholars in the field. Many such academic biographies exist, but it is worth drawing attention to just a few in which the role of the study of the Bible has reflected or been part of wider issues in the humanities and perceived as a challenge to how the Bible should be studied within a faith tradition. In past generations it was normal for students to come to the study of the Bible only after engaging with other fields such as classics, philosophy, or Semitic languages. It is well known, for example, that Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) had training that enabled him not just to

5. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941).

6. Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Leo G. Perdue and James O. Duke, RBS 50, 61–63, 4 vols. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009–2010).

7. See, e.g., John W. Rogerson, Barnabas Lindars, and Christopher Rowland, *The Study and Use of the Bible*, *The History of Christian Theology* 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988); J. Leslie Houlden, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1990); John H. Hayes, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

8. H.-J. Klauck et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–). Note also the accompanying book series, *The Study of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013–) and *Handbooks of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017–). It is interesting to note that there is no article in the encyclopedia on the place of the Bible in the humanities.

be a touchstone for historical-critical method in several disciplines but also as a historian of religion and Semitist to make significant contributions to the study of Islam.⁹ Other notable figures who have engaged with biblical studies on the basis of wider academic interests include Alexander Geddes (1737–1802), Wilhelm de Wette (1780–1849), and William Robertson Smith (1846–1894).¹⁰ Robertson Smith was particularly concerned with historical criticism, an academic concern that cost him his Aberdeen teaching position, and also with the comparative study of religion, a subject on which he published extensively while teaching Arabic at the University of Cambridge at the time of the emergence of the social sciences. His breadth of approach in the humanities was evident in his work as the chief editor of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from 1887.

There is thus nothing new in the study of the Bible in full engagement with other disciplines in the humanities, but what needs to be renewed is the recognition by scholars in other disciplines of the value of biblical scholars' more recent insights and approaches. In some countries it is still the case that students rarely encounter critical biblical studies until the postgraduate level, so that first encounters with biblical studies can be informed from other disciplines. However, nowadays it seldom works that students who develop an interdisciplinary interest in biblical studies also play a role in the academic disciplines from which such interests come. The fragmentation of knowledge has contributed to increasing specialization, and it seems that few scholars who bring their past scholarly experiences to the study of the Bible actually make the journey back again to significant participation in the humanities and the social sciences disciplines from which they might have come.

The development of biblical studies as a discipline in its own right has been both facilitated and hindered in various ways by its settings within universities and colleges. Especially in Europe and North America and

9. See, especially, Julius Wellhausen, *Muhammed in Medina: Das ist Vakidi's Kitab al-Maghazi in verkürzter deutscher Wiedergabe* (Berlin: Reimer, 1882); Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin: Reimer, 1902).

10. See Reginald C. Fuller, *Alexander Geddes: Pioneer of Biblical Criticism, 1737–1802* (repr. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); John W. Rogerson, W. M. L. de Wette, *Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography*, JSOTSup 126 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); William Johnston, ed., *William Robertson Smith: Essays in Reassessment*, JSOTSup 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

in other places that tend to follow those academic traditions for some reason, two possibilities have been dominant. On the one hand, biblical studies has most commonly been housed in faculties of theology as a sub-discipline within Christian theology, often at the service of ecclesiastical authorities. The supposed separation of church and state in the United States has resulted in biblical studies for the most part being confined to private institutions, from ivy league schools of divinity to seminaries of one denomination or another. In other places, even in the United States, biblical studies is a subdiscipline within departments of religious studies where one or two specialists offer courses that can be set alongside those offered by teachers of religion, ancient history, or classics. Even in such multidisciplinary contexts, however, those scholars who interact regularly with colleagues in biblical studies seldom venture to work with the insights of biblical studies in their own research outputs.

The overall argument in this section of this brief chapter has three points. First, the history of biblical studies shows many instances where scholars with major interests in the Bible have also been part of the wider discourses of the humanities and latterly also of the social sciences and have contributed to those disciplines in ways that have been recognized by specialists in other fields; the hope is that such valuable dialogs can be rediscovered and take place once again in order to prevent the marginalization or even dismissal of biblical studies in the academy.

Second, many biblical scholars have had some training in disciplines other than those traditionally honed within biblical studies itself. Such scholars often put their expertise to good use with valuable results for the field of biblical studies. Other biblical scholars have often joined in the discussion and looked to learn bits and pieces from other disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences in order to provide new perspectives on ancient texts and traditions or to propose suggestive questions and possible answers when such texts and traditions seem unable to speak for themselves. Much in those cases is a one-way direction of travel in methods and approaches from other disciplines into biblical studies, a one-way traffic that may enhance the concerns of biblical studies but not form a set of interactive approaches in which biblical studies can move from the edges to be a valuable conversation partner at the tables of the humanities and social sciences more broadly.

Third, those biblical scholars with well-honed skills in other disciplines should be encouraged for the sake of the humanities as a whole to publish their work as part of the projects and perspectives of other disciplines, and

their institutions should give them credit for so doing. Thus, it would not then be surprising to discover a biblical scholar participating in a wider interdisciplinary project that was intent on the integration of the insights from the field of biblical studies within its own aims and objectives. In such ways biblical studies would once again take up a position within the humanities or social sciences as was more commonly the case in previous centuries. It is, of course, true that social media now allow for the swift exchange of news about what is taking place across many disciplines, but even that does not necessarily lead to biblical studies having a leading place within major projects in the humanities or social sciences.

One way forward can be identified in the fact that most methodologies in the study of the Bible are shared with other disciplines, even if some of the technical terminology might be different. So, for example, much of the development of curricula in the humanities since the Reformation period has been based on the study of texts. A fundamental distinction has commonly been made between the tasks of so-called lower and higher criticism. Lower criticism has commonly been given priority, though not preeminence. Its concern has been with establishing an appropriate form of the text that can then be used by interpreters for their own purposes. The leading sixteenth-century exemplar in the field concerned the text of the New Testament as studied by Erasmus whose ambition was to create a sound Greek basis for the eventual production of a fresh Latin translation. The New Testament was fundamental to Erasmus's project and its contribution to text criticism, but the renaissance of textual criticism for the Hebrew Bible has been provoked in large measure by the much more recent discoveries in the Judean desert since 1947. Such a renaissance does not seem to have resulted in other disciplines in the humanities turning to biblical studies for enhancing their own text-critical approaches.

Indeed, one of the leading contemporary introductions to the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible has been written by Emanuel Tov, the chief editor of the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project (1990–2009).¹¹ Tov opens his work with reference to the famous statement by Alfred E. Housman:

A man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself. What the lectures and

11. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

treatises can do for him is to save him time and trouble by presenting to him immediately considerations which in any case would occur to him sooner or later.¹²

The point to be made here is that while a major work in biblical textual criticism pays highly suitable homage to a significant classical scholar (and poet), classical scholarship or those interested in textual criticism in general do not repay the compliment.

The general absence of biblical studies from recent works of text-critical theory in the humanities is a cause for concern. It is a cause for concern at a general level, since it shows that much in Western scholarship has been so secularized that scholars in the humanities outside biblical studies have not yet recognized that much in biblical studies also participates in the study of the Bible as a cultural phenomenon. It is a cause for concern since the study of both the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible and the New Testament have engaged in major reconsiderations of what textual criticism might be about, both in terms of defining its aims and in overturning the paradigm of the differentiation of lower and higher criticism.¹³ In terms of redefining aims, textual criticism is now seen to be as much about the transmission of texts as it is about trying to reconstruct the best or earliest form of a text. The reconstruction of textual archetypes, a worthy academic exercise in itself, is now considered just part of a larger exercise in understanding textual transmission.¹⁴ Part of the change has come about because students of the Bible have become more aware of the value of studying extant manuscripts as material artifacts in their own right.

Indeed, it is the case that the material turn in the humanities and the social sciences has produced a range of perspectives that often stand over

12. Alfred E. Housman, "The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism," *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 18 (1922): 67; cited in Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 1.

13. See, e.g., George J. Brooke, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Demise of the Distinction between Higher and Lower Criticism," in *New Directions in Qumran Studies: Proceedings of the Bristol Colloquium on the Dead Sea Scrolls, 8–10 September 2003*, ed. Jonathan G. Campbell, William J. Lyons, and Lloyd K. Pietersen, LSTS 52 (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 26–42.

14. For the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament see Ronald Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, TCS 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); for the New Testament see David Parker, *Textual Scholarship and the Making of the New Testament: The Lyell Lectures Oxford; Trinity Term 2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

against more theoretical or abstract conceptualizations. In relation to the study of manuscripts as material artifacts, the interest in materiality has gradually encouraged the production of digital technologies in which the Bible has a significant place, largely because many of the medieval Western manuscripts that survive are copies of the Bible or contain texts that relate to the Bible in some way as commentaries or liturgies or theological treatises. Thus, it is the case that biblical scholars have been playing significant roles in projects such as the CEDAR Project at the University of Chicago: the project is concerned with manuscript encoding to enable the construction of large-scale databases for text-critical purposes and it is using Genesis as one of its four test cases.¹⁵ Such a project can make significant advances when coupled with some kind of Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), particularly one that is enabled to discern paleographic variations, even within a single scribal hand.¹⁶

Thus, in some areas of digital humanities, the Bible has found its place once again alongside other textual corpora. As with the use of the tools and methods of other disciplines in biblical studies, digital humanities has been widely appropriated by biblical scholars as many publications indicate.¹⁷ But the point of this chapter is that biblical scholars need to be thoroughly embedded in those projects where such things are being developed. It is thus good to see, for example, that Claire Clivaz, a New Testament scholar by training, currently holds a significant position in enhanced learning at the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics. Such appointments indicate that biblical scholars can not only benefit from the developments produced by others but can also make highly significant contributions of their own to

15. CEDAR is short for the Critical Editions for Digital Analysis and Research. It is a powerful XML graph database at the University of Chicago.

16. Several TEI projects are ongoing and operate with standard encoding practices; note those associated with Peter A. Stokes and his collaborators based at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Hebrew manuscripts of the fifteenth century have formed part of their project. See Stewart Brookes et al., “The DigiPal Project for European Scripts and Decorations,” in *Writing Europe 500–1450: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Aidan Conti, Orietta Da Rold, and Philip Shaw (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 25–58.

17. See, e.g., David Hamidović, Claire Clivaz, and Sarah Bowen Savant, eds., *Ancient Manuscripts in Digital Culture: Visualisation, Data Mining, Communication*, Digital Biblical Studies 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2019). As well as that Brill series, see also the multivolume series *Introductions to Digital Humanities—Religion* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019–).

the improvement of technologies of use across the humanities, as well as indicating to others what the benefits of such technologies might be to students of the Bible.

At a less technical methodological level, it can readily be seen that major thinkers outside biblical studies, even in the twentieth century, have provided much for biblical scholars to think about, not least because they have taken biblical examples for the enrichment and presentation of their ideas. The works of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) can possibly be understood as of key importance in appreciating how redaction criticism developed in the interwar years as the counterpart in biblical studies to the attempt to identify the mental processes of individual authors and editors of texts and traditions. Freud himself ventured into more direct engagement with the biblical text through his imaginative reconstruction of Moses as an Egyptian and the significance of his supposed murder; though now generally ignored, Freud's final book is an intriguing rethinking of the biblical text in the light of the engagement between his own ideas and those of Egyptology.¹⁸ In another area, in constructing his ideas on memory, Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945) gave a significant exemplary place to the topography of the gospel narratives in order to construct a major example of how his theory could be seen to work. Few gospel scholars now read or engage with Halbwachs on gospel topography, though cultural-memory studies remain of importance for students of both the Hebrew Bible, largely through the work of Jan Assmann, and also of the New Testament, through such authors as Anthony Le Donne.¹⁹ Or again, the thoughts on authorship provoked by the essay of Roland Barthes (1915–1980) were implicitly directed against claims of divine authorship of the biblical text, which Barthes thought of as a fundamental misconstrual of how texts came to be.²⁰ In all three of those examples, it is clear that the Bible in some way figured large, though in all three cases one

18. Sigmund Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1939).

19. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

20. Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," *Manteia* 5 (1968): 12–17. See now Sonja Ammann, Katharina Pyschny, and Julia Rhyder, eds., *Authorship and the Hebrew Bible*, FAT 158 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

wonders whether more direct engagement with biblical scholarship might have rendered the argumentation of greater continuing relevance. Nowadays it is much more difficult to discern any significant role for the Bible and its scholarship in the wider fields of the humanities and the social sciences. For example, if the nonbiblical volumes in the Oxford Handbook series are consulted, there are very few, if any, references to the Bible in them. Thus, in the forty essays in *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*, there is no reference to all the work that has been done on biblical historiography, and there are but three incidental references to the works of Josephus.²¹ Perhaps one should not expect any such cross-referencing, but the absence is indicative of the point that this chapter is making.

Of necessity, because of their subject matter, several of the disciplines of the humanities, such as literary studies or the history of art, do indeed have long-standing interests in the Bible.²² It is intriguing to note, however, how the Bible has been approached often without much attention to how scholars today might construct the most suitable understanding of such texts at various points in the past. A small example can be used to make the point. In the Arena Chapel in Padua, Giotto was commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni to provide decoration; it was completed in 1305. There have been many monographs by art historians that have described the contents of the frescoes and which have commented on the individual scenes in relation to the texts that they represent. Although it is indeed likely that Albert of Padua, an Augustinian, influenced the overall composition that Giotto adopted, the multilayered exegesis of the various scenes, not least in interaction with one another typologically, reflects something of the Dominican approach to scripture as exemplified most explicitly by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), notably in his widely read *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.²³ Most of the scenes depicting Jesus either concern his nativity and early life up to his baptism, or his final days in Jerusalem.

21. Ryan K. Balot, Sara Forsdyke and Edith Foster, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

22. See, e.g., Umberto Eco and Jean-Claude Carrière, *This Is Not the End of the Book*, trans. Polly McLean (London: Vintage Books, 2012), 289–322; they discuss the influence and role of the sacred book. For the history of art it is noteworthy now, for example, that the National Gallery in London is fully engaged with biblical scholars under the leadership of Professor Ben Quash (King's College London) in the development of several projects.

23. On the influence of Albert of Padua see Giuliano Pisani, *La Chapelle des Scrovegni* (Milan: Skira, 2021); on the exegetical approach in the chapel being influenced

Only two scenes depict the activities of his ministry: the first is a depiction of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11) and the second the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–57). Both are from the Gospel of John; a wedding and a funeral act as the envelope for Jesus's public ministry. Given the influence of Dominican exegesis, it is quite possible that this Johannine summary of Jesus's public ministry reflects the strong influence of Aquinas's *Commentary*. Art historians tend not to engage with the exegesis of the Bible that was available to Giotto or those who influenced him but give priority to other matters as they read the text of the Bible for themselves. In instances such as this, the biblical scholar can assist the art historian and others in the better understanding of the whole composition.

The lack of thorough-going engagement with the text of the Bible and its interpretation by biblical scholars is a common feature in several disciplines of the humanities. The case is even more acute in the social sciences. The hallmark of the social sciences is engagement with contemporary societies in all their diversity so as to provide insight into human behavior in all its complexities. To that extent some social scientists are focused on the study of the individual, especially the individual in community, others are engaged with human communities and their social and political organizations, yet others are focused on the nature of culture. Nevertheless, when biblical scholars seek to apply the insights of the social sciences to matters in the past or even to the role of the Bible for individuals and communities today, there can be conclusions that can contribute to the methods and theories of the social sciences themselves, whether, for example, in the study of sexuality and gender, aspects of health and well-being, the dynamics of race and ethnicity, or the consideration of colonial and postcolonial perspectives.

Overall, it can readily be seen that in the past biblical scholars have continually benefited from being part of the wider mutually interactive discourses of the humanities and social sciences. Biblical studies continues to benefit from the insights and methodological approaches of other academic disciplines in many respects. The plea in this chapter has been that biblical scholars should engage more explicitly with colleagues across other disciplines to share with them how the study of the Bible can be part of a wide range of discourses for the mutual benefit of all disciplines. Particularly in

by Dominicans, see Laura Jacobs, *Giotto and the Arena Chapel: Art, Architecture and Experience* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 333.

the secular West, the study of the Bible should not be pushed to the scholarly margins or completely ignored, but it should once again be a significant part of the academic analysis of what it means to be fully human.

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What Has Been Changed in Helsinki?

Christoph Levin

As its name already suggests, the Centre of Excellence Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions (CSTT) aimed to study *changes*, specifically those related to the religious heritage of the ancient Near East and, more narrowly, to ancient Judaism. But it also experienced changes in itself and in turn caused lasting changes that had an impact far beyond those directly affecting the Centre. In this way, it became part of the processes of tradition formation, tradition processing, and tradition transmission that were the object of the project's research. In short: an interesting paradigm.

In the study of antiquity, the written sources at our disposal usually remain unchanged, unless the ground deigns to once again reveal a remarkable new discovery. For some decades now, ancient Near Eastern iconography has been a field of research in its own right. And, of course, our knowledge is constantly growing through the discoveries of archaeology. But what is changing above all is the way we see this diverse material. The study of history is shaped by the progress of time, which causes one's own vantage point to change and, as a result, one's own view of the past to change with it. Since the past remains alive only through our interaction with it, even the past itself changes.

At CSTT, the circumstances of interacting with the past were exceptional indeed. First, there was the unusual breadth of the project. A large number of researchers and young scholars were able to work together at the Centre. Most of them were Finns, including, of course, the group leaders. In addition, there were researchers (in varying combinations) from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This internationality, held together by English as

the language of research, brought together a great diversity of perspectives, national scholarly traditions, and their methodological preferences. Hence, there was a correlation between quantity and quality.

Diversity likewise resulted from the wealth of different subject areas that came together in the project: Septuagint research, biblical literary history, ancient Near Eastern studies, Qumran research, and Palestine archaeology. In all these fields, the University of Helsinki has achieved a position of international preeminence. The prerequisites for this were created (on the basis of an important Finnish academic tradition) by a number of high-profile scholars, whom we gratefully remember here, including Simo Parpola, Heikki Räisänen, Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen, and Timo Veijola. Not only did these scholars individually produce fundamental work in their respective fields, but they also succeeded in establishing a local scientific culture and in attracting numerous students who in turn have since left their mark on their subject areas, not only in Finland. Today, research is already being shaped by the next generation and the one after that. Helsinki is, on a global scale, one of the most important places both for biblical studies in all its aspects and for ancient Near Eastern Studies.

“We know only in part” (1 Cor 13:9)—Paul’s observation rings true especially for the study of ancient history and religious history. The sources have only been preserved in very fragmentary form, and the living conditions and world view of modern times are so far removed from antiquity that it requires a great deal of controlled imagination to even come close to understanding the mentality of that bygone time. Our understanding seems to be hemmed in on all sides, there is a wide range of interpretations. Under these conditions, specialization is even more necessary than in other fields of the academy if reliable results are to be achieved. If you do not want to be poking around in the fog at random, you have to concentrate your efforts on a narrow field. But such specialization comes at a cost: it narrows one’s horizon. This means that essential parameters are not available, parameters that might be, and indeed probably are, necessary for the assessment of even one’s narrow specialty. We save ourselves from errors in this situation not by extrapolating on the limited basis of a single field but through continuous exchange of information among specialists. This is the most important reason why larger research networks are established and funded. The great success of CSTT was based on the combination of the profound depth of individual research and breadth of the disciplines involved.

I will try to give an account from my point of view, the literary history of the Old Testament. I study the extant religious literary tradition of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as well as of the emerging Judaism of the Persian and Hellenistic eras. The central question concerns the conditions under which this literature came into being, as well as the modalities of its transmission and, not least, the inevitable changes that the collection underwent, mostly in the form of commentary that expanded the text. Such changes may have occurred by chance. As far as can be traced, however, they were in most cases deliberate. The predominant method of tracking down such changes is the penetrating analysis of the text with an eye to its linguistic, formal, and thematic coherence or incoherence. But concentrating on the wording inevitably entails a certain one-sidedness.

Under these circumstances, it is immensely beneficial to work with specialists who, for example, study the material side of ancient manuscripts. This type of research has been made possible by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are, of course, being studied all over the world but with particular acuity here in Helsinki. Another question is how original the wording of the Hebrew text, my usual object of study, actually is. In this matter cooperation with researchers who specialize in textual history, and especially in the ancient translation(s) of the Bible into Greek (the so-called Septuagint), is essential. Septuagint scholarship is a subdivision of Old Testament scholarship that has developed a life of its own through major edition projects, its own international scholarly organization (IOSCS) with its own conferences and periodicals. For a long time, Helsinki has been one of its most important centers, with translation technique being a particular object of interest. As in my own field of work, there is a certain danger of falling prey to idiosyncrasy here, and as such mutual critical engagement with the outside is useful, even necessary, for both sides.

At CSTT, it has been proven—and this has recently become the widely accepted state of research—that in literary history there is no difference in principle between textual changes that can be identified for internal reasons alone and textual changes that can actually be proven by comparing the manuscripts and especially by comparing the ancient translations. Through the exchange between textual criticism and literary criticism, the traditional boundary between evidence-based text-critical methodology, on the one hand, and pure textual analysis, on the other, has increasingly been proven to be obsolete. This insight has gained great methodological

weight and come to be reflected in publications that are internationally regarded as setting new standards.¹

The changes to how biblical literary studies and ancient Near Eastern Studies cooperate have been less fundamental, but interaction has nonetheless certainly intensified considerably within the framework of CSTT. The aim was to understand the Hebrew Bible as part of the multicultural world of the ancient Near East. Although large parts of the ancient Near Eastern text inventory have been known since the last third of the nineteenth century, it has still been underestimated how much the Israelite Yahweh religion was influenced by its environment from Egypt to Babylon and Assur, but also by its more immediate Levantine environment for which the texts from Ugarit have been available to us as comparative material since 1930. For decades now, Martti Nissinen, founder and director of the Centre, has been highly regarded as an international specialist in both the Old Testament and the ancient Near East. Like no other, he has furthered our understanding of the history of religion tangible in the Bible, especially with regard to prophecy. This applies to divinatory practice as well as to the literary expression it has found and through which it has remained accessible to us. Religious life in antiquity, both at the private and local level and at the level of official religion at the royal court, consisted in such prophetic practice to a considerable degree. Through the written record of prophecy, we gain access to the conditions of life, the religious ideas, and the more general world view of the people of that time. Biblical exegesis benefits from this research especially in that such research helps refine our understanding of the genres of prophetic literature. The CSTT has published, among many other works, Nissinen's fundamental monograph, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* and the volume of his collected essays, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*.²

1. E.g., Hanne von Weissenberg, Juha Pakkala, and Marko Marttila, eds., *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, BZAW 419 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, RBS 75 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible*, FRLANT 251 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala, *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible: Toward a Refined Literary Criticism*, RBS 97 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022).

2. Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspec-*

The study of the changing religious tradition also requires knowledge of the material conditions. Here, interaction with archaeology has been fruitful. The University of Helsinki has long been involved in Galilee archaeology. The excavations mainly concern the Late Bronze Age as well as the Early Iron Age, but findings have also come to light that reveal the conditions of life of Hellenistic Judaism in this part of the country. This research is rapidly blossoming into its own field and gaining great importance both for Jewish Studies in the narrower sense and for our understanding of the environment of the New Testament. For the same period, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide an extensive set of source material from Judah. It is becoming increasingly clear that the last three centuries BCE, and among them especially the second century, were a decisive phase for the development of Judaism. The Centre of Excellence Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions has decisively advanced our appreciation of this process of formation and change.

The CSTT has shown how powerful interdisciplinary exchange can be, especially for the study of ancient cultural history, religious history, and literary history. Since the culture of our modern Western world is built to a considerable extent on the heritage of Judaism and Christianity, without which our present world view cannot be understood either, this research has immediate social relevance despite the distance of over two millennia. Modern society, which is itself engaged in a process of rapid change, needs this knowledge if it wants to understand itself. Public financial support is therefore not a cultural luxury, and interdisciplinary research associations are an adequate way of ensuring the impact of scholarship on society. CSTT has had such a lasting formative impact both on the exchange among established researchers and on the training of young academics. It generated a wealth of new insights and at the same time provided a remarkable number of young researchers with a stimulating environment and the material foundation on which to build a successful academic career. The collaboration grew more intense from year to year, and at the same time I was able to witness how the doctoral students grew into independent research personalities. The number of publications and successful graduations speaks for itself. It has been a great pleasure to have been able to participate in this process in an advisory and observing capacity.

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Appendix

CSTT Members and Select Bibliography

List of Members

Director: Martti Nissinen

Vice-Director: Anneli Aejmelaesus

Team 1: Tero Alstola, Helen Dixon, Sebastian Fink, Patrik Jansson, Sanae Ito, Gina Konstantopoulos, Izaak de Hulster (vice-leader), Raz Kletter, Lauri Laine, Raija Mattila, Martti Nissinen (team leader), Andres Nõmmik, Katri Saarelainen, Sanna Saari, Jason Silverman, Saana Svärd, Emilia Tapiola, Tuula Tynjä, Joanna Töyräänvuori, Kirsi Valkama, Shana Zaia

Team 2: Anneli Aejmelaesus (team leader), Paavo Huotari, Tuukka Kauhanen (vice-leader), Katja Kujanpää, Marketta Liljeström, Drew Longacre, Elina Perttilä, Jessi Orpana, Marika Pulkkinen, Christian Seppänen, Miika Tucker, Hanne von Weissenberg

Team 3: Francis Borchardt, Pasi Hyytiäinen, Juha Pakkala (team leader), Ville Mäkipelto, Reinhard Müller, Urmas Nõmmik, Mika Pajunen (vice-leader), Timo Tekoniemi, Anssi Voitila

Team 4: Katri Antin, Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, Patrik Jansson, Jutta Jokiranta (team leader), Jessica Keady, Lauri Laine, Jeremy Penner, Hanna Tervanotko, Elisa Uusimäki, Hanna Vanonen, Sami Yli-Karjanmaa

List of Visitors

Felix Albrecht (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

Amar Annus (Tartu ülikool)

Régine Hunziker-Rodewald (Université de Strasbourg)

Anna Kharanauli (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University)

Natia Mirotadze (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University)

Urmas Nõmmik (Tartu ülikool)

Elisabeth Sawerthal (King's College London)

Blaženka Scheuer (Lunds universitet)
 Jonathan Stökl (King's College London)
 Pablo Torijano Morales (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)
 David Villar (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

Selected Publications of CSTT Members
 Prepared and/or Published as a Part of the Project

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